The
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of
Especially
Yuri
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Before
The
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The Progress of Yuri is Especially Fast Before the Deadline

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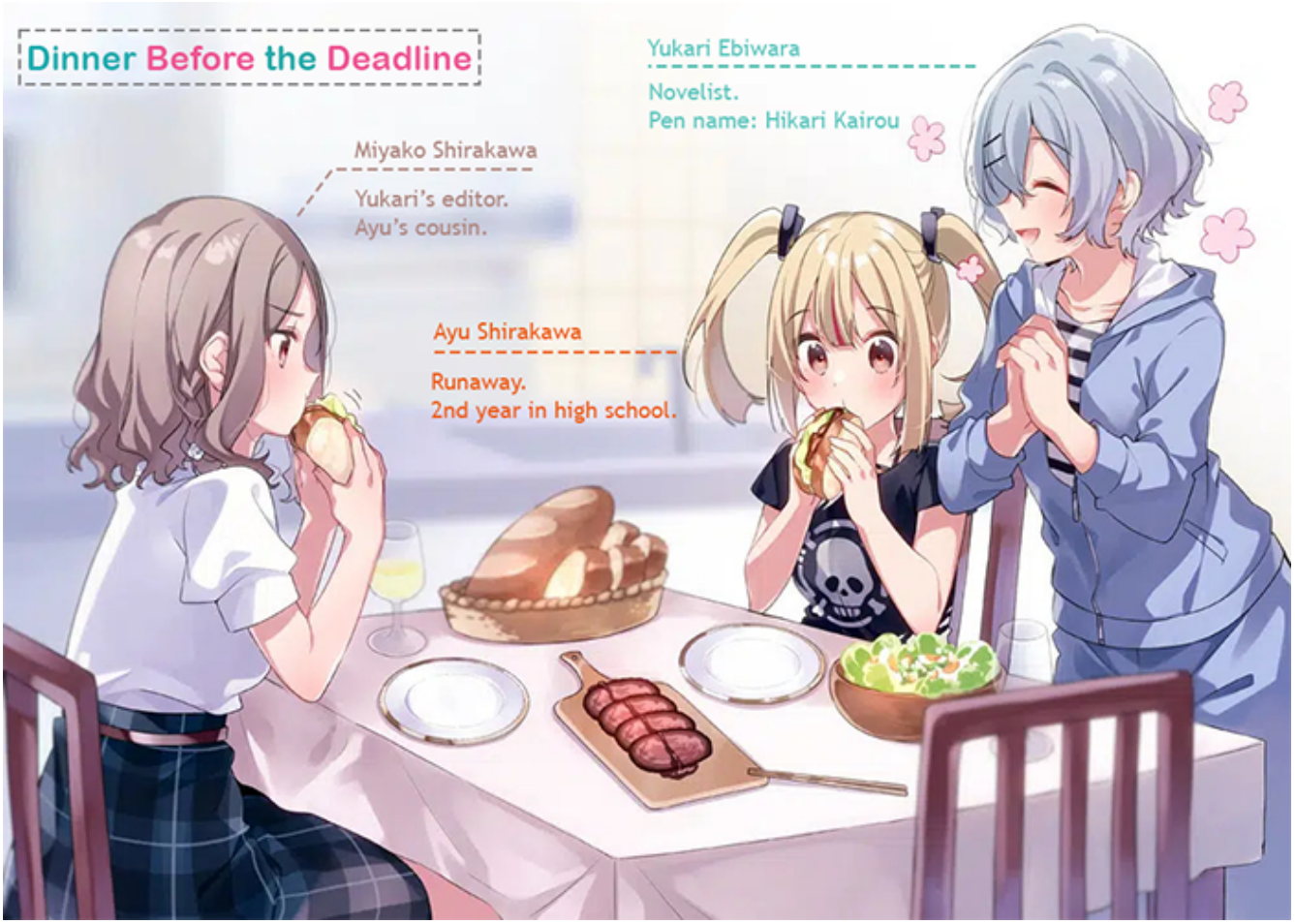
Dinner Before the Deadline
Yukari Ebiwara
Novelist.
Pen name: Hikari Kairou
Miyako Shirakawa
Yukari's editor.
Ayu's cousin.
Ayu Shirakawa
Runaway.
2nd year in high school.

Bathroom
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Aquarium Date

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The progress is great!

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Chapter 1: The Progress of Encounters is Especially Fast Before the Deadline

This is a pure and ordinary romance story about a lonely person no longer being lonely.

*

Ayu Shirakawa realized that she loved girls in her 2nd year of middle school.

She learned the concept of LGBT from TVs. However, she's a bit hesitant to admit that she's homosexual. To "prove that she isn't", she read every book and website about LGBT. In the end, she reaffirmed that she's a lesbian, the L in LGBT. In other words, she's a girl that loves other girls.

After realizing she's lesbian, she still kept it from others for a while. She pretended to be in the majority until graduating from middle school.

After she was in her 2nd year of high school, the school taught about LGBT one day. On that day, she chatted at the food court in a supermarket with her close friends after school. What was introduced in the lesson became the topic of their conversation. Among them, there was a girl who was basically the leader of the group. She had maintained a close relationship with Ayu. You can say that she's Ayu's best friend. At that time, the best friend said, "I won't mind at all even when someone like that is next to me." The group agreed at the same moment.

"I don't have any bias. It's common to be gay at modern times, right?"

"Yeah, it's bullshit to discriminate against gay people."

I see. Ayu was surprised, excited, and also relieved.

Recently, it’s pretty common for gay couples to appear in Japanese shows and movies. The BL shows <Ossan’s Love> and <What Did You Eat Yesterday?> are also popular within her friend circle. Perhaps people have a higher acceptance of LGBT’s existence nowadays.

With that, Ayu immediately came out at that moment. She made it clear that she’s a lesbian.

Although her friends were shocked, they immediately followed with a smile. The group said nothing would change. We’re still friends.

On the next day, everyone in the class knows Ayu is a lesbian.

Ayu questioned her best friend why she spread the word around. In the end, she showed a painful expression and nearly broke down in tears.

“It’s because I’m still pretty disgusted by it. I bet you’re staring at us erotically when we are changing clothes during PE lessons, right?”

Ayu was speechless.

Ayu doesn’t have love for every single woman. Also, she only treated her as a friend. …However, she can’t swear that there’s not a trace of desire when she sees a girl’s naked body.

This best friend followed the momentum and expressed how much fear she experienced when she met a chikan on the bus. After that, she burst into tears. The other classmates stood on her side. Ayu is exposed to disgusted, despising, curious, and even sympathetic looks.

Ayu’s mind couldn’t process it.

She neither confessed to her best friend nor had feelings for her. Of course, she never even thought of sexually harassing her.

Did Ayu really deserve to be forced to come in front of the whole class? Did she deserve to face her best friend's tears and be viewed as a bad person?

…No, even if she's a totally bad person, she would've given up if her personality was a sin. She could've just pretended this place had nowhere for her to stay. However-

"Hey, don't do that to her! It's not Shirakawa-san's fault! She's pretty pitiful too!"

The person who stood on Ayu's side and yelled was the most handsome guy in the classroom. He's really popular with girls.

This scene is like a shoujo manga MC saving the FMC. A normal girl would've loved him at this point.

However, what controlled Ayu's brain at the moment was "anger".

-Pity.

That was the last thing Ayu wanted to hear.

Ayu's body is burning like fire. Her head is all red too.

"I dare you to say that again!"

At the next second, her beautiful direct punch was sent to the handsome guy's face. Also, Ayu Shirakawa learned karate for 10 years.

"I'm not pitiful at all!"

She could tolerate disgust and despise. However, being pitied blew her fuse.

She doesn't even remember what happened after that.

She was given a 2-week suspension due to the violence.

The punishment wasn’t what mattered to her. However, the school told her parents what happened, and they realized her sexuality.

They screamed, “Did something go wrong?” As for Ayu, she tried to keep her cool and explained LGBT isn’t a rare thing with her self-learned knowledge. However, her parents didn’t listen at all. They kept scolding her, “You’re a shame.”, “Something is wrong with you.” They even tried to force her into habitation.

Her parents are already pretty conservative. They still go on about things like “it’s a woman’s job to get married and protect the family”. She didn’t get along with them at the start. At this point, there was no turning back. She broke off her relationship with them.

No matter how loud “understand and protect the minority’s right” is worldwide, no matter how many anti-discrimination activities there are on TV and the net, they are nothing to dog shit people living in a dog shit rural society. Patriarchy is in full power here. There’s no place for LGBT.

Ayu was thoroughly disappointed with her friends, family, school, and home. She decided to leave.

She wanted to go to a big city like Tokyo.

There must be a lot of people like Ayu in Tokyo, right?

Ayu spent nearly 10 hours on public transport. She arrived in Tokyo before noon. The first thing she did was head to the salon. She dyed her plain black hair to gold and added a red highlight. After that, she changed her clothes to a super cool T-shirt with a big skull head icon she saw in a clothing store and a miniskirt. She wanted to get rid of her “country girl” identity as soon as possible.

After arming her appearance with a city look (in her imagination), Ayu wandered around the streets of Tokyo. She was trying to search for a place to live and earn income. However, regular estate agents won't take a teenage runaway girl seriously. She wanted to stay in a net café for a couple days. In the end, the police started questioning her when she was wandering around the streets in the evening.

"Are you a middle schooler? What are you doing here at this time?"

That was the first time she got questioned by the police. She was pretty startled, and her behavior was very suspicious. The cops immediately found out that she was a runaway and brought her to the police station.

The worst scenario for Ayu is for the police to contact her parents. She would be brought back to the countryside. The only option she had was to rely on the only person she knew in Tokyo.

That person is called Miyako Shirakawa. She's 10 years older than Ayu and her cousin. She's working in a publishing house in Tokyo.

Miyako was born and raised in Tokyo. Her clothing and hairstyle are pretty modern too. She's gentle and chic. Ayu has always loved her since little. She picked up karate under her influence too. Miyako's parents are city-vibe adults too. Ayu has hoped many times that she was born in this family.

Honestly, Miyako Shirakawa is Ayu's first love. Although she really hated to bother Miyako, now's not the time to care about that.

Miyako, who was still at work, quickly came to the station upon receiving Ayu's call.

Miyako saw Ayu during the new year. However, Ayu looks totally different now. Therefore, Miyako was a bit surprised when she saw her at that moment. However, Miyako still played with her and said, "She's my cousin.

She came here for a trip.” Ayu really appreciated her cooperation and respected her even more.

“So, what’s wrong, A-chan?”

They went to the café nearby. Ayu told Miyako about running away after arguing with her parents, but she skipped the details.

“Please, Miya-chan. Don’t tell my parents.”

“Uh, …I can’t do that.”

Miyako was really in a tough spot when Ayu begged her. However, she still respected Ayu’s decision of not wanting to go home.

“It’ll be troublesome if they filed a missing person report. I’ll still tell your parents, but I’ll convince them to let you live with me for a while. Is that alright?”

“Yes, …thank you, Miya-chan.”

Ayu nodded. Miyako immediately made a phone call. It was over very quickly.

“Your mother said okay.”

Miyako told Ayu. She’s confused about how Ayu’s mother said yes without much fuss.

“…My parents probably aren’t worried about me, right? They must be relieved after I am gone.”

After hearing Ayu’s sour words, Miyako said, “That’s impossible…” in a slightly worried tone. She sighed.

“Indeed, perhaps it’s better to keep your distance from them for now…”

“Miya-chan, can I live with you before I find a place to live?”

“Of course, …but you would rather find a place to live than go home?”

Ayu nodded determinedly after hearing Miyako’s question.

“What about school?”

“I’m quitting. …I can’t stay there, anyway. I’ll find a job and take care of myself here.”

“A job, …no one will hire someone underage without their guardian’s approval.”

“I can just make up an approval. Also, isn’t there something called the “high school girl economy” in Tokyo? I heard that even high school girls can earn big money.”

“A-chan.”

Miyako suddenly lowered her tone. She raised her head and looked pretty serious.

“I won’t allow you to get a suspicious job like that.”

That was the first time Ayu saw Mikayo being angry. Ayu was a bit afraid after seeing such boldness, but she continued.

“B-But I can’t live without money. …I can’t always bother you, Miya-chan…”

“No need to worry about that…”

At this point, Miyako sighed.

“But it’s hard for you to not mind that. …Are you really not planning to go home?”

“I’m never going back.”

Miyako looked into Ayu's eyes. After hearing her answer, she mumbled to herself.

"Hmm, …I really want to introduce you to some jobs, …but our company isn't hiring. …Maybe the magazine department has some, …ah."

Miyako suddenly bulged her eyes while mumbling.

After that, she asked in a slightly insecure tone. It seemed that she didn't recommend it.

"…There's a job that includes 3 meals and housing. You want to try it?"

"Yes!"

Ayu's eyes brightened after hearing Miyako's suggestion. She nodded several times.

"Got it. I'm planning to go there tonight as well. I'll make a call first."

Miyako started calling someone after that.

"Thanks for the work. This is Shirakawa from Branch Hill. I'm coming to you right now. Your draft must be finished, right? …No, please don't mind it. I'll wait in the room until you're done. I'll keep waiting. I'll keep waiting until the universe dies and everything disappears. …Ah, wait, don't hang up first. …Didn't you say you want a beautiful girl to take care of chores? You said you can keep up with the schedule if someone can help you. …I already found the person. She'll be here shortly. A beautiful girl who's willing to work for you, so you better wait in there. I'll turn you into fried shrimps if you try to escape."

Miyako lowered her tone and said something brutal before ending the call.

"Uh, that was…"

“A-chan, you know the novelist Hikari Kairou?” [TL: The name can also mean shrimp.]

Ayu was a bit confused with the sudden question.

“Eh? Uh, …I don’t.”

“I see. This novelist is pretty popular among high school girls.”

“I don’t read novels…”

Ayu suddenly realized something.

“Is the job you talked about…”

“Yeah, I’m responsible for this novelist. She’s too lazy and soft. …Her life is a total mess. She doesn’t work according to the schedule. She abandons the draft and goes on trips before the deadline. I can’t deal with her, but I can’t always keep an eye on her. So, I hope you can stay in Hikari Kairou-sensei’s house and be that useless piece of garbage’s tiny helper and whistleblower.”

“W-Whistleblower!?”

“Yes, break her collarbones if she wants to run away.”

“Ehh…”

Ayu is puzzled.

Honestly, she’s afraid of working at an unknown novelist’s house. Even though she can take care of chores, she doesn’t understand what a “whistleblower” means. However, she knows a job with housing and meals isn’t easy to find.

…Anyway, let’s start by meeting that novelist first.

Ayu clenched her fist and made up her mind.

“Is that novelist a guy…?”

She remembers that Miyako is working as an editor for boys-oriented novels. It’s common for novelists to be men. She is confident that she won’t lose in a direct fight with a guy. However, she still feels dangerous about living under the same roof.

Miyako smiled and eased Ayu’s worries.

“It’s a girl, of course. Relax. I think she’s the same age as Chi-chan, …so she’s around 22 or 23.”

“I-I see.”

She was relieved, but another kind of worry surfaced in Ayu’s heart.

*

Today is another common day before the deadline for her.

Yukari Ebiwara, 22 years old.

She’s a novelist. Pen name Hikari Kairou.

She made her debut after getting a new novelist grand award in high school. At this point, there are a dozen books under her name. A couple of them have very good sales too. Her works have a manga adaptation, an anime adaptation, and a TV adaptation. You can say that she’s one of the popular novelists.

Yukari woke up at 7 AM, ate breakfast, and went back to sleep. She finally woke up past noon and took a shower. After that, she sat in front of the computer and started rushing her draft. The deadline is tonight. However, she was only halfway through the draft used for the web version.

…It’s been 30 minutes, yet she stopped after writing a couple lines. She stretched her back, stood up, left the studio, and went to the kitchen.

Yukari stood in front of the open Nakajima kitchen in the spacious living room. She started cooking.

She took out a 600-gram beef leg from the fridge before taking a shower. She carefully wiped salt and black pepper on it. Then, when she was waiting for the taste to sink into the meat, she played 3 hours of Monster Hunter.

Next, she fried the meat using a pan. The surface of the beef looked slightly burnt.

“It’s beautiful. ♪”

She hummed a song as she covered the meat with bay leaves and wrapped it with aluminum paper. Then, she turned the oven to 100 degrees and roasted it for an hour.

There was some meat juice left on the pan. After adding grape wine, balsamic vinegar, soy sauce, sweet sake, and pasted garlic, she turned it into a sauce. While she was waiting, she turned on the karaoke and sang several anime songs.

She took out the beef from the oven and left it inside the aluminum paper. She watched a 2-hour movie during the process.

After the movie, she unwrapped the aluminum paper and cut the beef into thin slices using a meat cutter.

“Hoho…!”

Yukari smiled after seeing the red meat juice and the beautifully pink section.

There must be some failed attempts before such a perfect roasted beef can be achieved. In the beginning, she put it in the oven for too long, and even the

center turned grey. Right now, she can tell from the size of the meat, thickness, and parts. How much should she fry it? How high should the temperature be? How much time? She can answer all those questions now.

She's going to enjoy this meal with red wine on the roof.

She put the beef slices on the plate as she imagined this blissful moment with excitement. Just as she was about to add the sauce, her phone rang.

"Sigh…"

She frowned and stared at the screen. Yep, the person calling is her editor, Miyako Shirakawa.

She knew the call would last until her death if she didn't answer. So, she reluctantly picked up.

"…Hi, this is Kairou."

"Thanks for the work. I'm Shirakawa from Branch Hill. I'm coming to you now. Your draft must be finished, right?"

Yukari's expression turned stiff with her strong attitude.

"No, actually, I'm stuck in the last little bit. It's really just a little bit! I don't want to make Mya-san rush here. Let's just…"

"No, please don't mind it. I'll wait in the room until you're done. I'll keep waiting. I'll keep waiting until the universe dies and everything disappears."

Although Yukari pretended to reject passionately, Miyako continued with her calm yet terrifying tone.

Ah, I can't reject her. …Yukari quickly gave up.

This isn't the first time Miyako came to Yukari's house and waited for her to finish her draft. She even prepared a set of futons for Miyako to rest.

…Actually, my progress is great if you're talking about my level in Monster Hunter.

She thought of a joke. However, she felt that the mood didn't allow her to do that, so she swallowed it.

"Alright, I'll be waiting for you."

Yukari said that annoyedly as she prepared to end the call.

"Ah, wait, don't hang up yet."

"Hmm?"

"Didn't you say you want a beautiful girl to take care of chores? You said you can keep up with the schedule if someone can help you."

Yukari remembered she glanced at a rom-com manga when she was scolded for dragging the draft. It was about a beautiful girl taking care of a young man who lives alone. That's why she said that. Of course, she was just joking.

"Ah, I think I said that."

"I already found the person. She'll be here shortly."

"Huh?"

Yukari couldn't help but make a weird noise after she heard what Miyako said.

"I already found the person. A beautiful girl who's willing to work for you, so you better wait in there. I'll turn you into fried shrimps if you try to escape."

"Eh? Wait, Mya-"

The call ended.

Yukari stood there for a while.

“…Did Mya-san finally go insane…?”

If that is the case, I should account for 0.X% of the cause. Yukari reflected on herself slightly.

*

It took 15 minutes by Taxi from the café to Hikari Kairou’s house.

This quiet area is filled with new luxurious buildings and single-family houses. Hikari is living in a modern building that’s 5 stories tall. There are 3 apartments from G/F to 4/F. There’s only one on the top. A third of that floor is designed into a rooftop. Hikari Kairou’s home and studio is in room 501, the top floor.

Even though Ayu has no idea of the estate market in Tokyo, she can see how expensive this house is. What kind of person is living in such a luxurious building alone…?

Miyako entered the number 501 in the entrance lobby and pressed the call button. Yet, no one answered.

“Is she not here?”

Ayu tilted her head. Miyako took out her phone emotionlessly.

“…Open the door.”

The door immediately opened after Miyako finished the call in an emotionless tone.

“Sheesh, what a pain in the ass.”

Ayu and Miyako, who were mumbling, took the elevator and arrived in front of room 501.

Miyako pressed the doorbell. The door slowly opened. A goddess appeared behind it.

Goddess.

At least Ayu truly thinks she is one.

There’s a slightly listless smile on her beautiful face. She can’t look away from her.

Her hair is slightly curved. The color is somewhat light grey.

Her two pupils are a bit different. The right one is black, while the left one is silver.

She’s thin and tall. Her chest and waist are both super slim and soft.

For some reason, even though she’s just wearing a grey cotton jacket and pants, she still feels very pure aesthetically.

Ayu’s eyes and heart were immediately captured at that moment.

She didn’t know her dog shit life was just for her to meet Hikari.

It wasn’t until now that Ayu knew love at first sight was real.

“Thank you SO much for your work, Kairou-sensei.”

Miyako greeted her without emotions. As for Hikari Kairou, she answered with a refreshing smile. “Thanks for the work.”

Then, she looked at Ayu, who hid behind Miyako.

When their eyes met, Ayu’s heart pounded faster. Her body temperature rose, and her cheeks turned red as well.

Hikari is a bit surprised. She looked at Miyako again.

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“Mya-san, this is?”

“I told you in the call, right? She’s my cousin, Ayu Shirakawa. She’ll take care of you starting today.”

“Eh? Are you serious!?”

“Of course.”

“Really? Someone with common sense won’t bring another person here, right?”

“You think you look like someone with common sense? …I’m an editor. An editor will always make the novelist finish the draft, no matter the method.”

“Uwah, you have really gone mad…”

Hikari’s expression turned stiff, and she shrugged exaggeratedly. After that, she started observing Ayu.

“Uh, …Ayu-san? Are you really willing to work in my house?”

“Y-Yes!”

Ayu answered with a high pitch.

“It’s kind of embarrassing to say this. I’m not a good employer. You’re going to get exploited.”

“R-Really?”

She has heard about the so-called exploitation on the news. This is indeed the city. It’s scary…

Hikari continued sternly. Ayu was a bit terrified.

“Well, you have to prepare 3 meals, clean the floor, do laundry, get groceries, and check the mailbox every day.”

“Eh, …that’s totally fine.”

“Don’t underestimate Ayu. She’s an expert with housework. Her cooking is really good too.” Miyako interrupted.

Ayu was taught “housework is a woman’s job” ever since she was little. She had to help out with all the chores. That’s why she has such achievements. Therefore, she feels a bit complicated right now.

“You’re that amazing? …But that’s not enough. Aside from cooking, you have to do the dishes as well. There is so much work.”

“Isn’t that what I’m supposed to do…?”

Ayu couldn’t help but say what she honestly thought. “There are people who can’t do that in this world. The one in front of you is a great example.” Miyako said that in a deep voice.

“Ugh, I can do it. It’s just that I don’t.”

Hikari tried to retort.

“Hmm, there is also something else…”

Ayu interrupted her in the middle.

“I-I! I can do anything! So please hire me!”

Ayu suddenly bowed down. Hikari put up an almighty pose and judged her. Then, she showed an evil smile. “Oh?”

“Anything? Really?”

“Yes!”

“Including selling your body to me?”

“Can I!?”

“Eh!?”

Ayu bulged her eyes and asked. Hikari was shocked.

“Oi, Hikari! Don’t say those things to my cousin!”

Miyako scolded Hikari.

Ayu finally knew Hikari was joking after seeing their reactions.

“O-Of course not! That was my bad! But if you insist…”

Ayu glanced at Hikari while blushing. Hikari gave her a bitter smile.

“Relax, even though I love adorable girls, it’s not that kind of love.”

Ayu faked a smile after hearing such a direct explanation, but she felt pretty disappointed inside.

She thought her life was made to meet with her. It looks like this is just a misunderstanding.

*

Miyako really brought a beautiful girl here.

The editor Miyako introduced Ayu to Yukari. She thought something was wrong with the editor’s brain. While Miyako looks like a member of society with common sense, she sometimes plays her cards randomly. She shouldn’t be underestimated.

However, Miyako’s job requires her to deal with novelists who can’t deal with society. Perhaps it’s just right to be a bit weird.

…Instead of reaching a breaking point because she’s too normal, it’s better to have a few screws off in her head.

She swept away the negative thoughts in her head.

“Did you guys have dinner?”

Yukari asked Miyako and Ayu after bringing them into the living room.

“No.” Miyako gave a short answer.

“Well, let’s eat together. I was just preparing it.”

Yukari said that as she walked toward the kitchen.

Every time she looks at Ayu, who’s sitting on the chair and peeking at her, Ayu hastily plops her head down.

She’s like a chihuahua that’s afraid of humans. That’s Yukari’s first impression of Ayu Shirakawa.

Ayu’s big eyes are really beautiful. Her face still retains the innocence of either a high schooler or a middle schooler. She’s tiny, but her chest is huge.

She tied her hair into a short double ponytail. A tinge of red was dyed on her bangs. She’s wearing a punk t-shirt with a big skull head on it. Did she go out of her way to cosplay for Yukari, who loves anime? But she doesn’t look like Harley Quinn. …What character is she?

She thought about that as she put all of the 600-gram beef onto a big plate.

Yukari made Caesar’s salad and some baguettes when Miyako was on the way here. She put 3 sets of plates, chopsticks, and glasses. Finally, she tried to fill the glass with red wine.

“Wait! Don’t just try to drink so naturally!”

Miyako quickly stopped her.

“Eh? Aren’t you supposed to eat roasted beef with red wine?”

“No! You have to rush your draft after dinner. Drinking is banned!”

“Are you serious!? At least let me have a glass, my lord!”

Yukari begged with a solemn tone, but Miyako squinted her eyes.

“Who’s your lord? …You’ll pass out after having one glass. There’s no way you can write.”

“Mya-san is a demon! I spent 6 hours making this tasty roasted beef!”

“6…!?”

Miyako’s face turned stiff after hearing what Yukari said.

“So you really made this roasted beef by yourself, …and you spent 6 hours too…?”

“Ah.”

Yukari realized she slipped that out. Her expression froze.

“You still spent 6 hours cooking even though it’s the deadline…?”

Yukari’s voice softened and tried to comfort Miyako, whose blood vessel appeared on her forehead.

“Ahaha, calm down, Mya-san. I didn’t spend 6 hours hauled up in the kitchen! I’m just changing my mood.”

“…Then I bet you have great progress with your draft, right?”

“Of course!”

Yukari nodded determinedly. Miyako stared at her suspiciously.

“So, how much is left?”

Yukari avoided Miyako’s eyes and whispered.

“…Around half.”

“That’s the same as what I heard last time!”

“Hehehe…”

“Ah, this useless piece of garbage is really…!”

Miyako scratched her head. Just as she was about to erupt, a “Guuuu…” noise calmed the mood down suddenly.

The noise came from Ayu’s stomach.

Yukari and Miyako stared at Ayu. Ayu blushed and lowered her head.

“A-chan, are you hungry?”

Ayu gently nodded after Miyako asked.

“I haven’t eaten anything since yesterday…”

“Ehh!? You could’ve ordered a sandwich when we were at the café.”

Miyako asked Ayu in shock. Ayu’s lips curled down.

“But the sandwiches there cost 700 yen. …I couldn’t order something that high-class.”

“Hoho…”

The adorable speech coming from a poor standard student made Yukari laugh.

…After hearing such cute words, Yukari couldn’t help but try to prank her.

“Hoho, we have a starving child here. Let’s eat. Eat up, Ayu-chan.”

“Ah, sure, …well, let’s eat.”

Ayu gulped and picked up the chopsticks. Then, Yukari said this to her calmly.

“Right, I tried to compare my annual salary and actual working time and convert them into my monthly salary. The result is 530,000 yen/hr. I spent 6 hours making this dish. This means that this roasted beef costs 3,180,000 yen. Well, you can pay me back after you earn the money. Here, eat up. ♪”

“3-3,180,000 yen…!”

Ayu dropped her jaws as she looked at the roasted beef on the table. She cried, “Miya-chan…” as she glanced at Miyako. She’s like a puppy that has to wait for her master before eating. It made Yukari’s heart skip a beat.

“A-chan, don’t listen to Hikari’s BS. …Let’s eat.”

Miyako said that as she put a slice of roasted beef in her mouth.

Yukari smiled and followed Miyako. Each bite causes the layered sourness and rich meat juice to overflow. Today’s roasted beef is the best one so far. It’s a shame without red wine.

“Here, eat up, A-chan.”

Miyako distributed a couple of beef slices onto Ayu’s plate.

Ayu looked at the plate, Miyako and Yukari in order.

“…W-Well, …let’s eat.”

She shivered while picking up a slice of meat and chewed. Then, her big eyes grew even larger.

“Tasty! This is super tasty!”

Ayu swallowed the first one, then immediately the second one and the third. The meat on her plate disappeared in an instant.

“Hoho, eat more.”

Yukari’s lips naturally curled upward after seeing Ayu’s manners. The person who cooked feels just as happy as the person eating it. Even though Miyako praises her sometimes, she’s always rushing Yukari’s draft when she’s here. The food can’t be enjoyed to its fullest.

“It’s nice to put it in bread too.”

“Here, eat up.” Yukari sliced open a baguette and put in some roasted beef, salad, and mayonnaise. She handed it to Ayu.

Ayu’s eyes were sparkling. She took the roasted beef salad sandwich with both hands and dug in.

“Sheesh, your cooking is just as good…”

Miyako’s face is filled with all kinds of emotions. As for Yukari, she replied chicly. “Hohoho, told you.”

“Can I ask-“

Ayu started a conversation when she was still eating like a hamster. She decided to swallow everything in her mouth before continuing.

“C-Can I ask something!? If you’re so good at cooking, there’s no need for me to make meals, right…? I’ve never made roasted beef before…”

Miyako answered.

“This little idiot loves to make dishes that take a lot of effort on the deadline. Even though it’s really good, …why cook it before the deadline!? I forgot which time it was. I was about to kill her when she was rolling udon dough before the deadline!”

“Ah, I think that happened. I just had a roll on the udon dough instead of the draft.”

“Stop with your wordplay.”

Miyako squinted her eyes and sighed. She continued.

“Although her cooking skills are excellent, she always eats instant food or take-outs. …I hope A-chan can make healthy meals for Hikari.”

“Healthy, …o-okay, I’ll do my best.”

Ayu nodded nervously. Yukari gave her a relaxing smile. “I’ll be in your care.”

*

Opening her eyes, she saw an unfamiliar ceiling.

To be exact, the lamp below the ceiling isn’t a rectangular object dangling on a rope. Instead, it’s a circular lamp with a speaker in the middle.

Ayu is sleeping on the sofa in the living room. A towel is on her body.

She rubbed her eyes and stood up. She slowly became conscious of her surroundings.

She sat on the sofa to rest after eating dinner yesterday. A while later, a strong urge of sleepiness made her lie down.

She spent the whole night staying awake on the train. She didn’t have a moment to rest in Tokyo either. It looks like her body is more exhausted than she thought.

Looking around, she saw Miyako working on her laptop.

Ayu looked at the clock on the wall. It’s around 2 AM now.

“Oh, you’re awake?”

Miyako knew Ayu woke up and asked her.

“Yes, …Miya-chan, what are you doing?”

“Hmm? Work.”

“It’s so late. Being an editor is surely hard.”

Ayu is surprised. Miyako explained.

“But we wake up pretty late. Our industry usually starts working at noon all the way until midnight.”

“Oh? Why?”

“Novelists, illustrators, and people working in manga and anime are all nocturnal. The editor who cooperates with them follows the same cycle.”

“I see.”

I didn’t expect there’s an industry like this. Ayu’s horizon expanded.

“Right, where’s that person?”

“Hikari is rushing her draft in the studio room. I really want to believe that she can finish before dawn…”

Miyako is really worried, but Ayu has a question.

“Huh? Wasn't the deadline yesterday?”

“…Our industry has a saying. The morning of the next day still counts as today.”

“The morning of the next day still counts as today…!?”

This sentence is clearly contradictory. Ayu looked confused. So, Miyako smiled bitterly.

“That’s just a messed-up theory from a messed-up creator. No need to remember it, A-chan. Forget about that. There’s a futon in the bedroom. You should go change and sleep. Right, did you bring clothes?”

“Ah, yes, …I brought some.”

Before she ran away, she randomly shoved some underwear, t-shirts into her backpack. Including her phone and wallet, that’s everything Ayu has now.

“Really? That’s good. Ah, you want to take a bath before going to bed?”

Miyako looked at her body after Miyako asked. Although there were no apparent dirty marks, she did sweat a lot wandering around the streets. Perhaps it smells bad.

“Uh, …sure.”

“Alright, …Hikari! I’m using the bathroom!”

Miyako yelled at the door of Hikari’s studio room, but no one answered.

“Don’t tell me she’s sleeping…”

Miyako stood up and slightly opened the door. Ayu followed Miyako and peeked inside.

The four walls are filled with bookshelves in this 3 m2 room.

Hikari is writing the draft for her novel using a laptop. She’s listening to music and some other stuff while working. That’s why she didn’t hear Miyako’s voice.

“Phew, …she seems to be working seriously.”

Miyako sighed in relief.

“I’ll prepare the bath.”

Miyako gently closed the door and walked to the bathroom. It looks like she’s really familiar with this place.

15 minutes later, the hot water control panel in the living room signaled the bath was ready.

“The bathroom is next to the entrance. You can use towels and shampoos. Hikari won’t mind.”

“O-Okay.”

After Miyako said that, Ayu took out her clothes from her backpack. She left the living room and opened the bathroom door.

It’s been a long time since she last entered someone else’s bathroom. After realizing she’s a lesbian, she always finds excuses when someone invites Ayu to a sleepover.

She took off her clothes and walked into the bathroom. After spending more effort than usual to clean her body, she slowly sank into the hot water.

The bathtub here is much bigger than the one in Ayu’s house. There’s still a lot of space left after she stretched her legs.

“Phew.”

She leaned her head on the side of the tub and took a deep breath.

She’ll be starting her new life here tomorrow.

The worry toward an unknown life, the regret of running away from home to Tokyo, the reflection after hitting someone, the sadness of breaking her relationship with her friends and family- all of these emotions won’t be solved for a while. However, right now, the strongest feeling in her heart is hope.

Miyako is just as reliable and gentle as always. Also-

Hikari Kairou's face came into Ayu's mind. Her body turned hotter.

At this moment…

The bathroom door was opened. Hikari walked into the bathroom.

Since she's taking a bath, so, of course, Hikari is wearing nothing.

She grabbed the showerhead a bit dazedly.

"Hmm…?"

Hikari noticed Ayu opening and closing her mouth repeatedly. She frowned.

"Eh? Why is there a girl in the bathroom…?"

Hikari mumbled to herself confusedly. She stood there. Her perfect naked body is facing Ayu. After a while, she gasped and bulged her eyes.

"Uh, I remember. You're Ayu-chan! Miyako's cousin, right! You're here for work! Sorry, my brain isn't working because of how tired I am. …Ah, I'm glad. I thought I died while working and got reincarnated into a dating sim's world. That freaked me out."

Hikari laughed. Ayu's cheeks are as red as a tomato.

"Ah, u-uh, I'm sorry that I used your bathroom without your permission. I'll leave now!"

"It's fine. Don't mind it. I'm just clearing my mind with a shower."

Hikari twisted the tap after saying that and turned it all the way right. Water splashed onto her head.

Hot water is flowing down her body along her silky skin.

This scene is both erotic and holy. Ayu can't look away from her.

Hikari spent a minute showering.

“Phew, much better.”

She turned off the tap and washed her face. Then, she looked at Ayu.

Ayu quickly submerged half her face in hot water. Hikari smiled gently after seeing that.

“Well, take your time.”

Naturally, Ayu’s eyes were fixed to Hikari’s back when she left the bathroom. Her back, butt, and legs captured Ayu’s imagination. She even wanted to touch them.

Her face flared up. Her heart is pounding. It feels like she’s about to explode. After Hikari leaves the bathroom, her naked body is still engraved under Ayu’s eyes. Pain is coming deep from Ayu’s body. Ayu sighed in anxiety.

“…!”

She realized her hand was unconsciously reaching to her lower abdomen. Tears appeared in her eyes because of how embarrassed she was.

Ahh, I’m being so disgusting right now.

-It’s because I’m still pretty disgusted by it. I bet you’re staring at us erotically when we are changing clothes during PE lessons, right?

No wonder her friends rejected her.

Just then, her heart was still excited and filled with hope for her new life. Yet, right now, she’s overwhelmed by her shallow guilt.

I can never let that person know I’m like this-

Ayu Shirakawa

Height	151
Birthday	June 1st
Blood Type	B
Occupation	High School Student
Hobbies	Karate, I guess.
Good at	Cooking, Housework
Favorite author	No one in particular

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Chapter 2: The Progress of Breakfast is Especially Fast Before the Deadline

The next morning. 7 AM.

The bird calls outside the room woke Ayu Shirakawa up. She doesn’t know the exact names of these birds, but she knows they are different species.

She opened her eyes. Her brain was still a bit dizzy as she woke up from the blanket and observed her surroundings.

This is the novelist Hikari Ebiwara’s- her real name is Yukari Ebiwara’s- home.

Aside from the futon Ayu slept in, only a small table and chair is in this 4m2 room. This room is for guests to stay. It was mainly used by Hikari’s editor, Ayu's cousin, Miyako Shirakawa. She used to stay up all night to wait for Hikari’s draft.

Starting today, this became Ayu’s room for living.

Perhaps it’s because there’s nearly nothing inside. Ayu feels like it’s more spacious than her own room.

Although Miyako introduced her already, she just saw Hikari yesterday. Is it really okay to let her stay here? Also, she’s as beautiful as a goddess-

“…!”

Hikari’s naked body in the bathroom a few hours ago came into Ayu’s mind again. She quickly suppressed that image.

Hikari lets Ayu stay because they are both girls. If she knows her feelings, it’s guaranteed that she’ll kick Ayu out.

Stay sharp. Don’t expose my emotions. Calm down. Keep your cool.

“Phew…”

Ayu adjusted her breathing, stood up, and pulled open the door of the room. She’s still wearing a T-shirt and her high school PE clothes as pajamas.

The room is connected to the living room and kitchen.

The bird calls got louder the moment she opened the door. It wasn’t until now that Ayu realized the noises came from the living room instead of the outside.

Is there a bird’s nest inside the house?

She raised her head in surprise. The bird noises became louder. Ayu finally realized it was from the speaker on the ceiling light.

“Tokyo is amazing…”

Unlike our shitty countryside.

Ayu couldn’t help but let out praises.

“What’s wrong with Tokyo?”

“Ah!”

Someone’s sudden voice made her jump.

When she turned around, she saw the house owner- Hikari Kairou was looking at her. She slowly stood up from the sofa in the living room.

“G-Good morning-“

Ayu hastily greeted her. She thought about how she should call her. Ebiwara-san, Yukari-san, Kairou-san, Kairou-sensei, Hikari-san, Hikari-sensei. …Ahh, she looks really cute in her pajamas.

She eventually gave up on calling her name.

“…Can I ask whether you slept there for the whole night?”

“Yes, I think I passed out after taking a sip of grape wine when Mya-san left.”

A red wine bottle and glass are on the short table in front of the sofa. There’s still a bit of wine left in the glass.

“Phwah…”

Hikari took a big yawn. Then, she stopped the bird noises from the speaker with her phone.

“What’s with the bird calls…?”

Hikari bitterly smiled after hearing Ayu’s question.

“The sparrows in this area are really loud during the morning. There are also crows. I don’t really like their noises. So, I play random bird noises at 7 AM every morning to compete with them.”

Hikari said that as she opened the tiny window in the room. The familiar noises filled the entire room. There are sparrows in the city too. Damn you, sparrows.

“Did the speaker wake you up? I’m sorry.”

Hikari closed the window and asked.

“I-It’s fine. I usually wake up even earlier.”

“Right, you’re a high school student.”

“Eh? Oh, right…”

Ayu looked away awkwardly.

How much did Hikari hear about Ayu from Miyako? Ayu didn’t explain all the details to Miyako. However, at the bare minimum, Hikari should know she’s a rural high school girl who ran away from home. Someone can’t welcome a person who makes trouble in their home. Am I indeed a source of the problem?

“Well, if we woke up anyway, then please make breakfast for me.”

Hikari didn’t realize the feelings in Ayu’s heart. She said that cheerfully.

“Breakfast?”

Hikari nodded.

“This is Ayu-chan’s first task. Mya-san said you’re excellent at cooking, right? I’m looking forward to a tasty breakfast. Hoho.”

Hikari’s pranking smile made Ayu freak out.

“P-Please don’t have too much expectation. …Uh, what do you want?”

“Anything. You can use all the ingredients and seasoning you want. Just make it simple.”

Freedom, simplicity, anything.

Honestly, this is the hardest request.

She hoped for more clear instruction. …Ayu suddenly realized something before she said it.

Hikari knows how to cook too. She must know “anything” is the most troublesome request.

If she still asked for that, it means this is probably a test. It's used to examine whether Ayu is capable of being the chef in the house.

"…I-I got it. I'll try my best."

Ayu gulped nervously. She walked to the kitchen.

This Nakajima kitchen is much cleaner and cooler than the one at home. There are 3 stoves. They are gas stoves instead of IH stoves. Ayu was relieved to know that. It's because she has never used an IH stove before. The conditioning table and sink are huge too. It can fit a couple more people. She couldn't help but imagine cooking shoulder-to-shoulder with Hikari.

There's a family-sized fridge. A grape wine shelf is next to it. The seasoning includes ketchup, mayonnaise, salad dressing, and barbecue sauce. There is also some sauce (she can't read the kanji), some sauce, some sauce, some sauce, and some sauce. A huge variety of juices and wine. Yet, there aren't many ingredients inside with a total lack of vegetables.

After that, she opened the refrigerator. Unlike the emptiness of the fridge, it's filled with meat, seafood, rice, ice cream, and all kinds of frozen food. However, there are still no vegetables.

"Why are there so many frozen…"

Ayu couldn't help but mumble to herself.

"Hahaha, it's because of the hometown tax. I bought too much stuff online too. There's no way I can eat all of them."

Hikari is already looking at her from the other side of the Nakajima kitchen.

…A high-class cuisine can be made from the ingredients in the refrigerator. However, it's a bit too much to have steak, snapper, or crab for breakfast. So, she closed the fridge and decided to use them later.

After that, she looked at the shelves under the kitchen. She found all kinds of seasoning and spices. Aside from the common salt, pepper, MSG, and Soumi stock, there is also high-class stuff like truffle salt. There are also basil, rosemary, and coriander. She only knows the name of those herbs. Some turmeric, cardamom, and garam masala can be found too. These are for curry, but she has never used them.

A bunch of cooking equipment is available too. There are pots and pans of all sizes, a couple knives for different purposes, a scoop, and a spatula. All of the basic stuff is here. She also saw some other tools with unknown purposes.

She grabbed one of the mysterious tools and asked Hikari. It's a metallic rod with a circular cup at the front.

"Can I ask…what this is?"

"That one? Uh, I think it's used for cracking eggshells."

"…C-Cracking eggshells?"

Ayu repeated after her once. She never thought cracking eggshells needed a specialized tool. People from Tokyo are amazing.

"Uh, what about this one?"

"It's used to slice up soft-boiled eggs."

"…Why not just use a knife?"

"You can just cut it once with this."

"I see. …That's convenient, …right?"

"But if you include taking it out and washing it afterward, just using a knife is easier."

Hikari explained in honesty when she saw Ayu's confused face.

“Uh, what about this one?”

“It’s a high-tech product that can easily separate egg white and egg yolk.”

“Oh.”

This is probably convenient, right? But if you ask her whether she really needs it, the answer is probably no.

There are still a bunch of unknown tools left. However, it’ll take forever to ask for each one’s uses, so she stopped there.

Ayu returned to the fridge. She thought about what kind of breakfast she should make to satisfy Hikari’s expectations?

“Hmm…”

“Hoho…”

Ayu saw Hikari staring at her troubled expression with a smile. Her face turned red.

“I’ll get awkward if someone’s looking at me.”

“Really? Well, I’ll wait over there. I’m hungry. It will be great if you can make something quick.”

“I-I got it.”

*

Ayu looks like she’s forcing herself. I wonder if she can make it.

Yukari Ebiwara is sitting on the sofa in the living room and reading the news with her tablet. At the same time, she is paying attention to Ayu, who’s making breakfast behind her.

Whatever the ingredients or kitchenware she uses, it’s fine as long as she can make something simple as fast as possible. No matter how bad it is, she’s fine with egg on rice or toast.

…Yukari isn’t really looking forward to it, anyway.

Although Miyako said her cooking skills are superb, Yukari doesn’t think a mere high school girl can make something amazing.

Yukari doesn’t really spend time and effort on what she eats.

Sometimes, she may suddenly want to make delicate dishes like the roasted beef from yesterday. However, she normally chooses supermarket bentos or microwavable food for lazy people. She bought a bunch of seasonings and spices a while ago to make an authentic Chinese dish and curry. Yet, she only used them a couple times. The Chinese food and curry from the convenience stores are quite good, anyway.

By the way, it’s been a long time since she last saw an egg knocker (she forgot the proper name).

The boiled egg cutter and the egg yolk egg white separator-kun (temporary name) aren’t even used after she bought it. Honestly, she almost forgot these things existed.

Yukari loves tools that can only do one specific yet unimportant thing for some reason. She can’t help but buy them, even if she doesn’t need them.

These things are made with a single purpose only. They are here because of that particular purpose. Even if they are forgotten when no one’s using them, they don’t complain or overthink. All these things do is wait for their chance to shine silently.

Sometimes, she’s really envious of an existence without the freedom of choice.

…It’s because only having to do one thing makes you not worried about your life.

*

After a while of consideration, the final breakfast Ayu made is the usual dish in her home.

The main dish is white rice (taking one of the rice sets in the refrigerator and microwaving them). The sides are seaweed tofu miso soup, egg rolls, small stir-fried fish with sesame seeds, stewed chicken, and salad with whitebait, tofu, plums, and kelp.

Actually, she initially wanted to make a dish with veggies too. However, if there’s none, she can only make dry kelp do the trick.

Every dish here is pretty simple. She is pretty hesitant about letting Hikari “check” her work. However, instead of challenging ingredients and seasoning she had never used before to make a terrible meal, she would rather take a step back.

“H-How is it?”

“……”

Hikari stared at the whole table of dishes for a while.

“Amazing. …It’s far better than what I expected.”

“Eh?”

Ayu is surprised to hear comments like that.

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“But every dish here is so simple…”

“Indeed, everything is simple, but it feels like I’m eating at home.”

“Eating at home?”

Ayu was confused. She didn’t understand what this meant.

“It was always like this when I was eating at home. There would be a lot of plates. I only realized it’s actually an amazing thing after I started living alone. After all, isn’t this troublesome? You have to make a bunch of stuff, do a lot of preparation, and pack up. Every day.”

…Is that the case?

Ayu’s home meal always comes with 3 dishes and soup, so she thought this was obligatory. Preparation and packing are her routines. She never thought about how annoying it was.

“I always prepare a plate only when I cook. Roasted beef is really just roasted beef. Curry is just curry. A rice bowl is a rice bowl. There won’t be any soup or side dishes.”

“You should at least eat some vegetables.”

“I have my supplements and vegetable juices. Relax.”

“……”

Ayu is definitely making vegetable dishes every day if she passes this test.

“Alright, let’s eat before the food gets cold. You should sit down too.”

“Oh, sure.”

Ayu sat opposite Hikari under her urge.

“Let’s eat.” Hikari’s first choice is egg rolls after sitting down.

“Oh, your egg rolls are in the sweet faction?”

“Oh, no. The three on the right are sweet. The three in the center are original. The three on the left are salty. It’s because I don’t know what you like…”

“So you went out of your way and made three kinds of them? You’re amazing, Ayu-chan…”

Hikari was pretty surprised after hearing Hikari’s explanation. She tried the other flavors of egg rolls.

“…Yeah, all of them taste good.”

“Glad to hear that.”

Ayu sighed in relief.

“Right, don’t tell me you also know how to make cheese filling or mentaiko filling too?”

“If there are ingredients…”

Hikari’s eyes brightened up after hearing Ayu’s answer.

“Well, please make cheese filling starting from tomorrow. I know how to make regular egg rolls, but it collapsed after I added the filling in. I can’t make such smooth egg rolls either.”

Tomorrow.

“…Can I make them for you tomorrow as well?”

Ayu asked that anxiously. Hikari tilted her head. “Isn’t this your job?” She asked with a natural tone before continuing.

“Oh, right, speaking of your job, we still haven’t decided your pay yet. How much does a tiny helper with housing cost…?”

“Y-You don’t have to pay me! Just letting me live here is enough.”

“I don’t think I can do that, but Mya-san actually said the same thing. Well, I won’t pay you in salary at this stage first. Your meals and living costs will be covered by me. We can talk if you suddenly need money. I can give you extra pocket money depending on your performance. Is that alright?”

“S-Sure, no problem.”

Hikari said all of that in one stroke. Ayu could do nothing but nod.

It feels like Hikari is used to dealing with servants. One example is how quickly she let someone she just met live in her house.

“Well, I’ll introduce my home after we’re done eating.”

Hikari said that as she prepared to grab another dish. During this time-

“C-Can I ask…”

“Hmm?”

“Uh…”

“Hmm?”

Ayu blushed as she looked at Hikari directly.

“H-How should I call you!?”

“Hmm?” Hikari is a little puzzled.

“I mean…your name.”

“Oh-“

Hikari nodded a few times. Then, she showed a mischievous smile.

“Well, you can call me ‘master’ from now on.”

“Master!?”

After hearing such an unexpected answer, Ayu still answered while shocked.

“…Uh, …I understand. …M-Master.”

“U-Uwah, …this feels more guilty than I imagined. …I take back what I said! Mya-san will probably break my collarbones if she knows I told you to call me master…”

Hikari’s shivering with cold sweat.

“Then what should I call you…?”

“Whatever suits you. Ebiwara, Kairou, Yukari, Hikari, Hitmonchan, Ebitchi, Yukarin are all okay. One shitty- …one senpai novelist I know even calls me Ebiko.” [TL: Hitmonchan’s Japanese name is Ebiwaraa.]

Ebitchi and Yukarin must be her nickname given by her friends in the past. It’s too rude to call her Ebiko.

Anyway, Ayu won’t call someone older than her by their nickname, but it’s too close to use her first name. If that’s the case, it’s safer to just call her “Ebiwara-san” or “Kairou-san”, right-

She finally made up her mind after a while of hesitation.

“…Well, I should call you Kairou-sensei.”

She felt that this name fits her role now the most. In other words, she’s the novelist Hikari Kairou’s tiny helper.

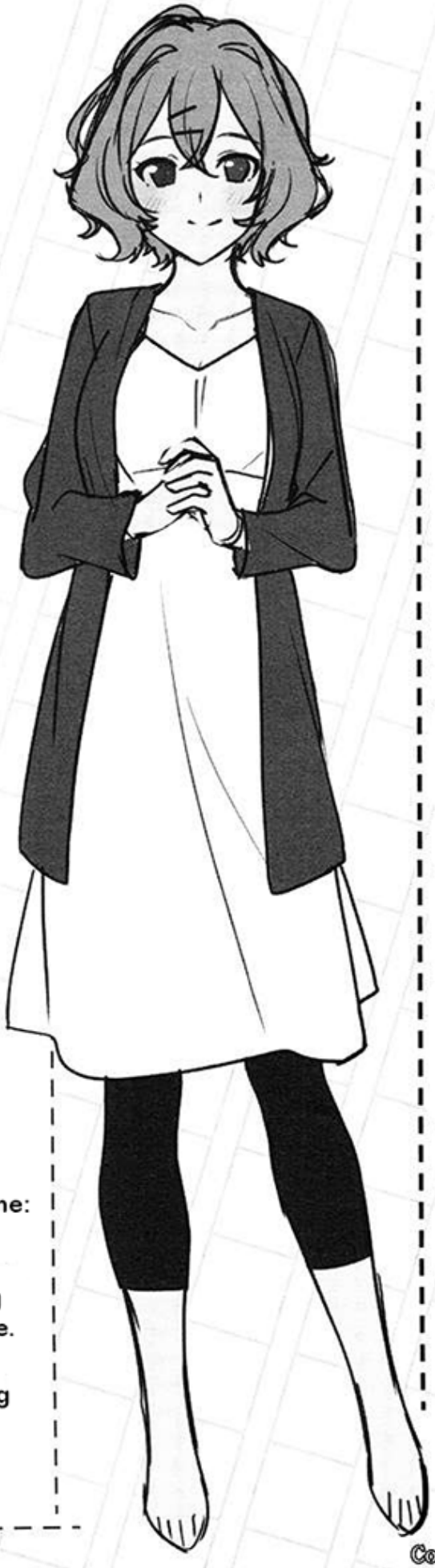
Ayu was a bit worried about whether Hikari would be upset from the distant name. However, Hikari’s expression didn’t change. She just nodded gently and said, “Hmm, got it.”

“Well, please take care of me from now on, Ayu-chan.”

“O-Okay, please take care of me, …Kairou-sensei.”

With that, their new life has finally begun.

Yukari Ebiwara



Height	165
Birthday	June 25
Blood Type	AB
Occupation	Novelist (Pen name: Hikari Kairou)
Interests	Gaming, traveling drinking and more.
Good at	Almost everything
Favorite author	Nayuta Kani

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Chapter 3: The Progress of Room Introduction is Especially Fast Before the Deadline

After finishing breakfast and doing the dishes, Hikari introduced her home to Ayu.

This building has a basement and 5 stories. There are 3 apartments on each of the floors from 1/F to 4/F. All of them are 1LDK apartments. Hikari is the only one living on the 5th floor.

Hikari’s home has an open kitchen connected to the living room, 3 western-style rooms, and a Japanese room. Then, there are the bathroom, toilet, and roof.

The western rooms are Hikari’s 3m2 studio room, a 4m2 bedroom plus entertainment room. The other 4m2 room is basically a storage for random things.

Ayu immediately felt speechless after entering this storage room.

There are a couple tall shelves that can nearly reach the ceiling. They are filled with books, game consoles, board games, CDs, Blu-rays, plastic models, figures, cameras, dolls, crafts, glass decorations, ceramics, toolboxes, make-up boxes, drawing tools, DIY tools, sports equipment, nail-polishing packs, and more.

Even though she did classify them, it’s still way too chaotic. It’s hard to imagine only one person is living in this house.

It’s more like 5 siblings with totally different ages, sexes, and personalities are sharing this space.

“…Do all of these belong to sensei?”

“Yes.” Ayu asked her formally. Hikari nodded in agreement.

“Also, the walk-in closet there has formal dresses, cosplay stuff, camp items, and fishing tools.”

“How should I say this? You have…a lot of hobbies.”

Ayu said that in surprise and shock. Hikari smiled bitterly.

“All of these are just used to find new ideas for my novel and change the mood. I’m not really committing my time. There isn’t really anything important here. You can use them how you want if you’re interested.”

“Oh, sure. …Thank you.”

The only thing that Ayu used to be passionate about is probably karate. All of the items here are in the realm of unknown to her. It can take her a whole day to consider which one to try out first.

“Right, I just arranged Ayu-chan a Japanese room. Do you prefer a Western room? You can use this room if you…”

“N-No, I’m fine with a Japanese room!”

It’s going to be a big project to move everything in this room to the Japanese room.

After that, they came to the roof.

The roof takes up a third of the space. There’s a brand-new garden table, two chairs, and a clotheshorse made with stainless steel. That’s it. It’s very spacious.

“Wow, this is amazing!”

Without much thinking, Ayu dashed to the edge of the roof and observed the view.

A 5-stories building isn’t a tall one. However, since there aren’t many skyscrapers around, the view is very wide and far.

She saw the tidy streets and the pedestrians walking on them. There’s even a park filled with greenery a bit further.

The image of Tokyo she got from the news and shows is pretty chaotic. However, this high-end residential area is completely different from what she expected. This place is elegant and quiet.

I’ll be living here starting today-

On one hand, she’s glad that she ran away from home. However, on the other hand, she’s worried about whether she is qualified to live in a place like this.

“Did you see anything interesting?”

Hikari came to her and asked.

“N-No, but…the view is beautiful.”

“Really? Hikari tilted her head.

Views like this should be very common to Hikari. It must be just a part of her life, right.

“C-Can I ask, …sensei.”

“What?”

“Do novelists, …well, uh, …get paid this much?

Ayu asked the question that she had been curious about since yesterday.

“Hmm, …a very popular novelist earns good money. I think it’s pretty extreme.”

Hikari answered quickly. She wasn’t offended by Ayu’s question.

“Well, is Kairou-sensei on the popular side too?”

“Hmm, I’m not really sure what it’s like in the publishing industry as well. Among all the authors partnering with Branch Hill Bunko, I should be low high-class or high middle-class.”

Hikari wasn’t being humble. She just described a fact objectively.

“High middle-class, …530,000 yen per hour.”

Ayu gulped in surprise. However, Hikari asked her in shock. “530,000 yen?” Ayu was the one confused after seeing Hikari’s reaction.

“Eh? It’s because sensei said your pay is 530,000 yen per hour…”

“Ahh, I was just joking.”

“Ehh!?”

Hikari confessed and shocked Ayu.

“Did you really think I was serious? Sorry, sorry, …pfft.”

Hikari couldn’t contain her laughter as she apologized.

“It’s not my fault. …I don’t know anything about this industry.”

Ayu blushed. Her lips curled down.

“…But you’re popular enough when you can live in an amazing place like this, right?”

“Hmm, …well, I can if I cut some corners. However, I don’t want to rent this house using my own money.”

“Eh?”

Ayu tilted her head. She still didn’t know what Hikari meant.

“My family is rich.”

Hikari said that directly. Her tone didn’t sound reserved or diffident.

“My dad’s the CEO of a big company. My two brothers and sisters are also presidents of related enterprises. Onii-chan gave me this house since he’s in the real estate industry. I asked him, ‘I want to live alone. Please give me a house, onii-chan.’ He agreed and gave me this apartment.”

Hikari said that half-embarrassedly, half-chicly.

“He has skyscrapers and mansions too. I thought I would waste a lot of time taking the elevator if I chose a skyscraper. However, a mansion is too big for me. That’s why I decided to live here.”

…She can easily get an apartment in a luxurious building when she says she wants it. That’s the family Hikari is born in.

A daughter of a billionaire CEO doesn’t just exist in shows. It’s in reality too. Right. If billionaires are real, so should their daughters. It’s just that this person is coincidentally in front of me.

She’s a beauty, a daughter of a rich family, and a novelist who was acknowledged by everyone.

From her tone, when she talked about her family and siblings, they must have a good relationship.

Hikari is way too different from a runaway girl. It’s even too arrogant and useless to compare these two.

Sigh, -she’s so far away, too far away.

The pain of melancholy is scorching Ayu’s heart.

“Oh, right!”

Unaware of Ayu’s feelings, Hikari suddenly yelled.

“What?”

“Let’s have dinner here tonight.”

“Here?”

Hikari smiled.

“Yes, I was actually planning to have roasted beef and grape wine here. Mya-san spoiled my plan. Even though there’s nothing to see here during the night, the stars above are pretty visible.”

“……”

Imagine having dinner together on a spacious and aesthetic roof under the starry sky.

Ayu thinks this is an excellent idea.

“…Excellent. I should work harder to prepare dinner.”

“Yeah, I’ll look forward to it.”

A wave of good luck was suddenly bestowed on her after she lost everything. Well, she should just accept everything for now-

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“Okay, let’s confirm again.”

They went back to the living room after the introduction. Yukari Ebiwara explained Ayu’s job to her.

“Hmm, the Roomba will basically take care of the corridor, living room, and the kitchen. So, you just need to sweep the corner sometimes. You don’t need to clean my studio and bedroom. The storage room just needs to be vacuumed every two weeks. You can clean the entrance and the roof if you think it’s dirty. As for the toilet, …I guess once a week will do? Clean it if there are clear dirty marks. It’s just that you have to take care of the bathroom every day. I’ll leave your room up to your decision. …That’s all for cleaning.”

“I-I got it.” Ayu nodded.

“Hmm, cleaning, doing laundry, cooking- these are your jobs. As long as you remember to do all three, the rest is your free time.

“Eh?”

Ayu gasped.

“Hmm? What’s wrong?”

“Uh…”

Ayu lowered her head as she looked at Yukari in fear.

“Miya-chan asked me to watch over sensei and make sure you’re working…”

“You can just forget about that.”

“Eh!?”

Yukari’s tone is pretty resolute despite smiling. Ayu bulged her eyes after hearing that.

Yukari smiled even more and exerted her pressure gently.

“You’re taking orders from me, not Mya-san, right? Isn’t it fine if I’m okay with it?”

“B-But the only reason I’m working here is that Miya-chan asked me to. … She even said I can break your collarbones if you try to run away.”

“Ohh, Mya-san actually said something like that…”

Yukari’s smile solidified. She continued.

“It’s fine, Ayu-chan. I’ll work even if you don’t watch. Trust me.”

She directly looked into Ayu’s eyes and persuaded her with a serious tone.

Ayu blushed and looked away.

“B-But didn’t Miya-chan come here because you weren’t working yesterday?”

Ayu’s accusation is right on the point, but Yukari isn’t moved at all. She continued.

“I was dragging my feet. I’ll admit that. …However, a novelist’s job isn’t just writing novels.”

“Eh!?”

“The actual time spent sitting in front of the computer and writing only accounts for a few percent in a novelist’s schedule.”

“Ehh? What does that mean?”

Yukari’s face turned stern and explained to the confused Ayu.

“The most important for writing novels are new excitements.”

“New excitements?”

“Yes, the easiest examples are heading out to get ideas and materials. Aside from that, while something looks unrelated to work on the surface, they develop my sensibility. Whether it’s reading, gaming, or watching movies.

Even if I’m traveling to a place irrelevant to the novel’s setting, perhaps it can be a reference to my future works, right?”

“I guess…you’re right…?”

“Exactly!”

Ayu emphasized that with a determined tone. She pressed on.

“Also, of course, health management is an important task too. Playing, eating good food, drinking, and sleeping is vital to rest the mind and body. It’s a way to adjust my attitude. In summary, a novelist is already working when she’s just living 24 hours a day!”

“L-Living is already working…!?”

Ayu dropped her jaws after hearing such a shocking revelation.

“Right, talking to you right now is also work for me too. In theory, as long as I’m a novelist, it’s impossible for me to not be working. So, there’s no need to watch over me. So? You get it?”

Ayu’s expression still looked unconvinced, but she still nodded. “…Okay, …I got it.”

Hoho, easy.

Suppose it was Miyako or other experienced editors. In that case, the first thing they say must be, “You’re just trying to procrastinate with all that BS. Prepare your collarbones!” But Ayu is still a child. She was convinced of this easily. How adorable.

Just as Yukari snickered inside her heart, Ayu took out her phone and started typing something.

“Hmm? What are you doing?”

“I’ll check this with Miya-chan first.”

Ayu said that as she showed her screen to Yukari. The message bar in Line writes:

<Is it true that living is already working for a novelist?>

“W-Wait, don’t send-“

Yukari quickly tried to stop Ayu, but Ayu pressed a button and sent the text to Miyako.”

“Ahh!?”

She immediately read the message. Miyako replied right away. If Miyako’s still awake right now, it means that she must have stayed up all night working since yesterday.

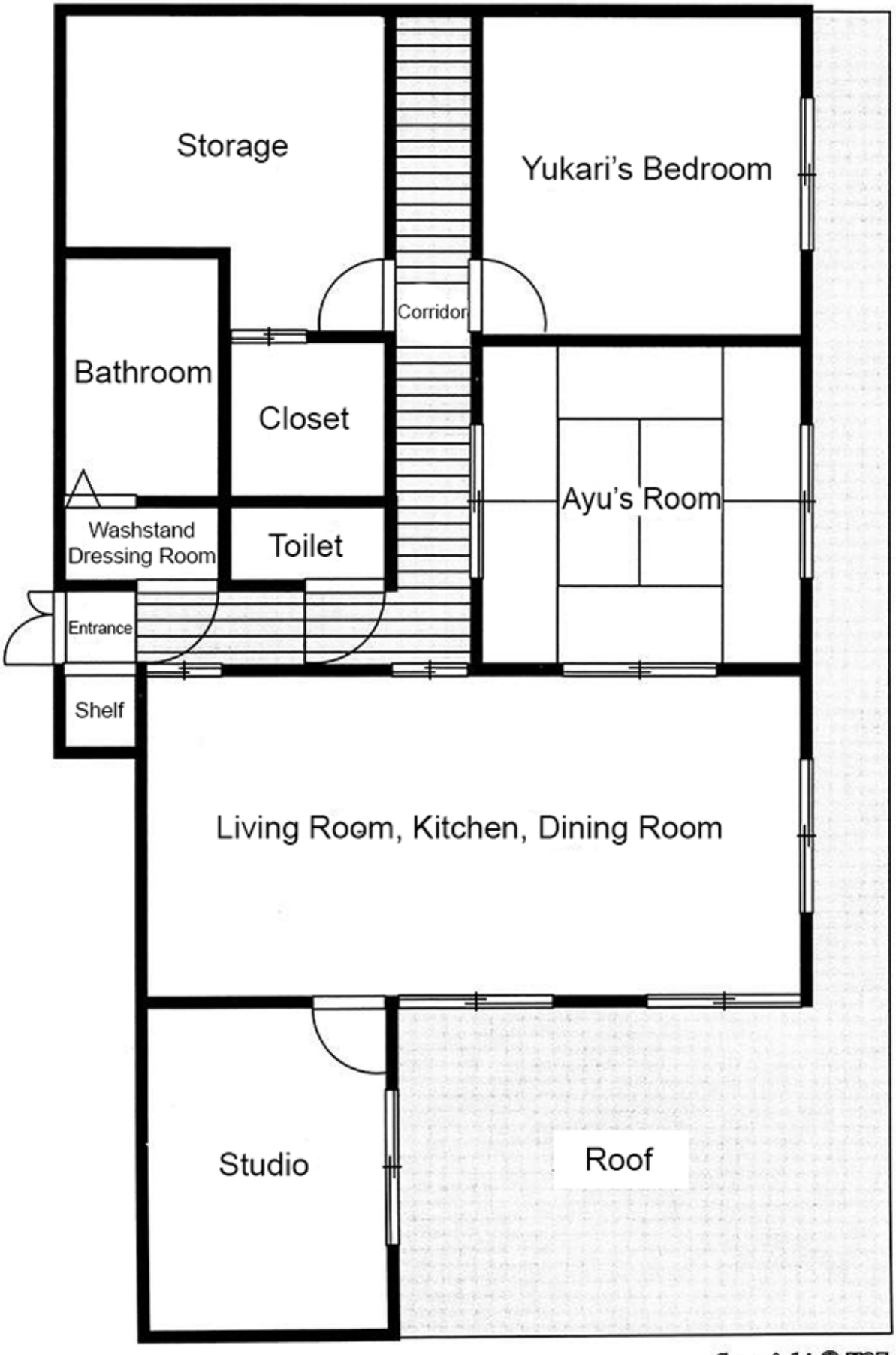
“……”

Ayu showed her phone screen to Yukari silently.

<Break that idiot’s collarbones for me.>

Yukari imagined Miyako’s utterly pissed expression. Cold sweat is dripping off her entire body.

Floor Plan of Yukari's House



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Chapter 4: The Progress of Shopping is Especially Fast Before the Deadline

10 AM. Ayu and Hikari (whose collarbones are intact) went out together. They went to buy Ayu’s daily necessities.

Hikari changed her pajamas. She decided to wear a wide t-shirt, cropped trousers, and half-rim glasses. Her witty expression really matches the glasses. Ayu’s eyes are entirely fixed on her.

Hikari was surprised after seeing Ayu’s eyes. Ayu quickly tried to find an excuse.

“C-Can I ask, sensei, are your eyes not good?”

Hikari answered.

“Ahh, this is just sunglasses. It’s just colorless.”

“Sunglasses, …don’t tell me it’s for changing your look?”

“Yeah, if you become as popular as I am, it can really cause a scene when fans see me.”

“Uwah, …that sounds rough.”

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It’s indeed tough having to take caution even when you’re just walking. However, it really feels like a celebrity. That’s cool.

Hikari chuckled.

“I’m just joking. Don’t take it seriously.”

“Eh!?”

“I’ve never shown my face to the media, and I always wear a horse mask on autograph sessions. Also, no one really cares about someone like me. It’s fine even if I show my face.”

“Ugh…”

Hikari laughed it off. Ayu’s face turned sulky after hearing that.

“You’re so honest.”

After saying that, Hikari suddenly got really close to Ayu.

Hikari’s unexpected move made Ayu’s cheeks flare up.

She is really beautiful. Her light grey hair is soft and smooth, and she has heterochromia.

Now that she’s taking a closer look, Ayu still feels like her face is as beautiful as a goddess or elf. Even though she doesn’t know what kind of novelist she is, her appearance is way too talented.

“Look closely. The pigments in my left eye are dimmer, right? The sun will be too much for me without sunglasses.”

“I-I see. …That’s rough.”

Ayu’s heart started pounding as she gently looked away from Hikari’s charming iris.

Hikari distanced herself too.

“Well, let’s go. We should get your necessities first, like utensils and toothbrushes. Should we go to a nearby department store? Or do you want to visit Shinjuku and Shibuya?”

“I-I don’t really mind. …Even a convenience store’s ones will do.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Let’s just go to a department store. I want to buy a new cup too. You want to use my used cups?”

“Sensei used it before?”

In other words, Hikari’s lips touched these cups, plates, and toothbrushes-

“Do you mind?”

“N-No! No problem at all!”

“Well, that’s settled.”

Hikari smiled happily.

“Ah, but I’ll get you a new toothbrush. Relax.”

Ayu is both relieved and disappointed after hearing that.

*

Yukari brought Ayu to the Takashimaya department store in Shinjuku. The Tokyu Hands here is one of Yukari’s favorites. Sometimes, she’ll aimlessly wander in there and buy all kinds of unnecessary stuff.

They got out of the taxi and went into the department store. Ayu mumbled to herself nervously. “This is Tokyo’s department…”

Yukari can’t help but smile warmly after hearing that. She complained internally. “Takashimaya has a bunch of stores in most cities, right.”

She doesn’t know where Ayu’s home is. However, she feels like this little girl’s imagination of Tokyo is too special. Yukari can’t understand this emotion since she was born and raised in Tokyo. However, she didn’t try to destroy Ayu’s fantasy bubble. Instead, she followed Ayu’s words.

“Yeah, this is a department store in Tokyo. Right, Ayu, did you bring your ID card?”

“Eh?”

Ayu looked really surprised. Yukari continued seriously.

“Your ID card. You have to get a shopping permit at the counter before entering Tokyo’s top department stores. You need an ID card for that.”

“R-Really?”

Ayu’s eyes bulged as she asked worriedly.

“…Can I use a high school ID card not from Tokyo?”

Yukari could barely contain her laughter as she answered.

“As long as it’s not high schools in Saitama Prefecture.”

“Glad to hear that. …I have it in my bag.”

“Fufu…”

Yukari tried her best to prevent herself from exploding into laughter. She smiled gently.

“I’ll wait for you here. You should get your shopping permit.”

“I-I got it.”

Ayu dashed to the counter as she showed her ID card to the concierge. Yukari nearly made a noise.

3 minutes later.

“Why do you have to come up with a meaningless lie like that!?”

Ayu’s face is as red as a tomato after she comes back. She protested to Yukari with teary eyes.

“Sorry, I didn’t think you would believe it. You’re so honest and adorable.”

“A-Adorable…!”

Ayu is even angrier after hearing that. Yukari smiled.

“Tokyo is just a part of Japan. It’s the same as where you’re from. You can buy whatever you want in most stores as long as you have money, get it?”

After hearing Yukari’s gentle tone, Ayu’s eyes suddenly bulged.

“Sensei, are you trying to make me realize this when you lied…?”

Hikari wanted to agree with a warm smile- but she couldn’t hold up her laughter and ended up chuckling.

“Y-You were really just trying to mess with me, right!? Ugh, …collarbones, …I’m breaking your collarbones…!”

“Alright, we’ll be disturbing others if we get too loud. Let’s go.”

Yukari walked in after saying that to Ayu, who was shivering from anger.

This girl is really worth pranking. Interesting. Perhaps she’ll hate me if I overdid it- …but whatever, I don’t care whether she hates me or not.

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Hikari’s first stop is the daily necessities area in Tokyu Hands.

Just as Hikari's eyes are rolling around the many types of goods, Hikari has already taken a tea bowl, a mug, and a small plate.

"Ayu-chan, do you want anything?"

"Eh? Nothing in particular…"

There are too many things. She still hasn't finished seeing everything on the shelf in front of her yet.

"Well, I'll go check out. You can wait for me here."

"Eh? You already decided what you're going to buy?"

Ayu asked in surprise. Hikari nodded.

"That's fast…"

"Really? I just chose something nice based on my instincts."

"Won't you regret after choosing like that?"

"I always do, but I can just get something new if I'm not satisfied."

Yukari's tone is pretty gentle, but she's being very straightforward.

"What will you do with the stuff you don't need?"

"I'll either give it to someone or throw it away."

Her mindset is really different from my own. …Ayu thought to herself.

Ayu always spends a lot of time pondering what stationery or tiny gadgets she should buy. After making a choice, she'll use them until it's completely broken. Although she spent a lot on buying clothes without a plan when she arrived in Tokyo, that's just to change her image to a city girl vibe. That's an exception out of an anomaly.

Is this difference due to Ayu being a kid while Hikari is a rich adult? Or is it unrelated to money?

“Oh, right, toothbrushes.”

Hikari interrupted Ayu’s train of thoughts.

“They have toothbrushes here too?”

Hikari answered Ayu’s question.

“I think I bought my current toothbrush here, but I don’t remember if it’s on this floor. Do Ayu-chan use an electric toothbrush? Or just a normal one?”

“Normal.”

“Electric ones are better. It can brush places that are hard to clean.”

“But, …aren’t electric toothbrushes expensive?”

Although Hikari said she doesn’t need to worry about money, Ayu still expressed her worries.

“Hmm, …I think the one I’m using costs around 30,000 yen. Why don’t you just use the same one like mine?”

“3-30,000 yen…!”

That’s how much Ayu’s New Year pocket money is this year.

“I can just use a normal one!”

“…My second-oldest brother had serious tooth decay around 5 years ago.”

Hikari suddenly started this topic with a solemn tone. Ayu is confused.

“What?”

“…There’s a cavity on his wisdom tooth. It’s very hard to brush it. The bacteria spread all the way down to his jawbone. I think the surgery took

around 4 hours. He had to return repeatedly for around 6 months after it was over.”

“……”

Ayu was terrified just from thinking about it.”

“The surgery was successful, and he took care of the wound well too. However, since a lot of special equipment was used, and his insurance didn’t cover it, the total cost was over 1,000,000 yen.”

“1-1,000,000 yen…!”

“After that, my family joined the electric toothbrush faction. Right, my brother married the dentist who took care of him. Although he got something out of it, this is irrelevant to what I’m talking about. So, please forget that.”

“Ehh…”

The encounter raised a lot of curiosity.

Even though 1,000,000 yen was spent, he took care of his cavity and married his lover. Perhaps it’s not something bad.

“Anyway, tooth decay hurts and costs a lot, not to mention the time spent on visiting a dentist. In comparison, paying 30,000 for a toothbrush sounds pretty cheap to me.”

“I guess you’re right…”

However, Ayu is still reluctant to spend 30,000 yen this casually.

Hikari smiled after witnessing Ayu’s hesitation.

“I’m banning you from being so polite with me on money from now on. That includes toothbrushes. This is an order from your boss, m’kay?”

Her tone is gentle, but Ayu can’t reject it.

Then, she showed a suspicious smile.

“Also, there’s no need to be polite with me. You can pay me back with your body.”

“M-My body…!?”

Ayu knows she doesn’t mean anything sexual, even without an explanation. She’s just saying, “You have to work properly.” But her face still flared up.

“I-I got it. Y-You’ll take care of me. I’ll…pay you back with my body!”

Hikari looked a bit confused when Ayu was so determined.

“…I’ll make it clear. I don’t mean anything sexual, alright?”

Ayu is fine, even if she meant it sexually. However, of course, she didn’t say it.

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After shopping at Tokyu Hands, Yukari went to Yodobashi Camera. It only takes a few minutes to walk from Takashimaya.

The store is playing its theme song and goods introduction announcement. It’s very lively. Yodobashi Camera is one of Yukari’s favorites too. Time passes quickly when she’s browsing PCs and games or trying out the audio equipment and massage machine here.

“An electronics store…? What are you buying here?”

Ayu asked her with a surprised face.

“A TV, game consoles, and TV shelf. It’s for your room.”

“My room!?”

Yukari is quite surprised by how shocked Ayu is too.

“Why are you so surprised?”

“Eh? I-It’s because…aren’t we just buying my daily necessities…?”

“Yeah, video games are one of them, right?”

“…R-Really?”

Yukari said something she thinks is reasonable. Ayu is confused for some reason.

“Eh? Don’t tell me you don’t play video games? You’re a modern teenager, though.”

“Uh, I did try out that Jewel of Atlantis in Line.”

“Did you play anything other than mobile games?”

“I didn’t, because I don’t have a game console…”

“You don’t have…a game console…?”

For a true gamer like Yukari, life without video games is like hell. She suddenly realized something at this moment.

“Did you run away because your parents refused to buy you games…!?”

“I-It’s not! Why would I run away because of that!?”

Yukari’s confident presumption was immediately denied by Ayu.

“…Hmm, …but having not played any games is a big problem.”

“What’s the problem?”

“If we’re living under the same roof, of course, I want us to play together.”

Ayu’s cheeks blushed after Yukari said that.

“W-Well, it’s not like I’m totally not interested in games…”

“Really? Then what games do you want to play?”

“Uh, …I’ve seen my friends playing that game where they live with the animals. I thought it was quite interesting.”

For some reason, Yukari frowned after hearing Ayu’s answer.

“Oh, that one. I played it for a while but stopped afterward…”

“Why?”

“You can change the villagers’ mantra in that game. I changed it to ‘go work’ half-jokingly. In the end, they told me to work every time I talked to them. ‘Good morning, go work!’ ‘It’s hot today. Go work!’ ‘I’m taking a break. Go work!’ …Where am I? Hell?”

“Didn’t you deserve it?”

“That’s not all. The in-game time is synchronized with the real world. The stores are closed during the night, and the villagers are sleeping too. If you want to devote your time to it, you have to rest and wake up properly.”

“Sensei should be the one to try out this game, right…?”

Yukari pretended that she didn’t hear Ayu’s hidden suggestion.

“Yep, animals can’t become our friends, after all. They should either be hunted, eaten, or used as materials.”

“Eh…”

Yukari bitterly smiled after seeing Ayu’s puzzled expression.

“Anyway, the game is still in my house. I’ll give it to you if you want to play it. Let’s go shopping first.”

Yukari ended the conversation and started browsing the goods with Ayu in the store.

Yukari brought a 50-inch TV, shelf, speakers, game console, and a couple of games that she has always been interested in. Everything will be delivered except for the games.

“Won’t Miya-chan get mad at you if you keep playing games?”

Ayu said that to Yukari, who’s very excited about her new games.

“Gaming is part of a novelist’s work.”

“You’re lying again…”

Ayu thought of herself being pranked in the department store as she showed a disgusted face. Yukari continued.

“It’s real. Games are listed as necessary spending in tax reports. You can ask Mya-san if you don’t believe me. If games are necessary spending, this means that gaming is a part of a novelist’s job. The nation even acknowledges it.”

“Tax, …necessary spending, …the nation acknowledges it…?”

Ayu still seems confused. She tilted her head, but she didn’t complain anymore.

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“Well, what are we having for lunch?”

Hikari asked that question after walking out of Yodobashi Camera. It’s already past 12:30 PM, and Ayu is indeed hungry.

“What do you want to eat?”

“I-I’m fine with anything.”

“Really?”

Hikari stared at Ayu, and it made her start to hesitate. However, she still nodded. “R-Really.”

Actually, Ayu does have her preferences, but basically, she can eat anything.

“Well, …how about insects?”

“I-Insects!?”

This option is too unexpected. Ayu bulged her eyes.

“There’s a store in Shinjuku where you can eat cicadas, bees, and scorpions. You want to try?”

Of course not.

Ayu has never eaten bugs before, so perhaps she may find it tasty after trying it. However, she doesn’t think she can eat it without any kind of mental preparation. This is just too sudden.

Regrettably, she already said okay. Perhaps Hikari will be very disappointed if she changes her mind-

“S-S-Sure…”

Ayu showed a stiff smile and squeezed her answer out, but Hikari smiled.

“I’m just joking. That store isn’t open during lunch hours.”

…Is she really going if it’s open during lunch?

Hikari looked around and asked.

“Well, …ah, how about ramen?”

Ayu nodded quickly after hearing that suggestion. “Sure! I think it’s great!”

There are a lot of ramen stores around here. They can see a few just by walking around. In the end, Hikari chose one that specializes in thick pork

bone broth. There are some photos of ramen at the entrance to the store. A few pieces of thick chashu are on the ramen.

Hikari entered the store without hesitation. She thought for a moment in front of the ticket machine. Finally, she ordered a pork bone broth ramen (with extra noodles) with boiled egg, corn, and red ginger.

Hikari looks pretty thin and slim. Her image doesn't match the super large pork bone broth ramen. However, come to think of it, she ate a lot of that roasted beef on her own yesterday. Also, she still finished the breakfast, even though it was huge. Don't judge a book by its cover. Perhaps her appetite is really big.

"What are you ordering?"

"Eh!? Ah, I'll get the same thing as sensei!"

Ayu didn't consider what she should get, so she answered that in a rush.

"Sides?"

"T-The same as well."

"Okay."

Hikari bought the tickets and handed them to the staff. Both of them chose the seat at the counter.

"Does sensei love ramen?"

"Well, …I think the probability of me choosing ramen is pretty high when I don't know what I want to eat. However, I don't like it enough to line up and wait."

"So, you just love it moderately?"

“If you ask me whether it’s moderate or super, I guess I belong to the latter. I know how deep the world of ramen is. However, lining up still doesn’t really fit my personality. Perhaps I just lack the energy to take that first step. I don’t even like to make reservations.”

“I see…”

That’s totally who Hikari is. Ayu accepted her at her word.

“Do you love ramen?”

“I do, …but I’ve never visited a genuine ramen shop before.”

Ayu answered a bit embarrassedly.

She has eaten ramen with her friends at school in a food district before. However, this is the first time she visited a shop exclusive to ramen.

“Really? Well, this will be your first time.”

“W-Wait! The wording…!”

Ayu’s face flared up. If she’s being honest, it’s her first time living with someone. It’s her first time working. It’s her first time owning an electric toothbrush and game consoles.

…If possible, she hopes that she can have her real first time with Hikari.

Ayu quickly dispersed the imagination in her head. She poured a glass of cold water for herself and chugged it down at once.

At this moment, their ramen has been placed in front of them.

“Let’s eat.”

The size of the ramen looks the same as the photos outside. Also, Hikari didn’t just order extra noodles, but additional sides as well. She’s still unfazed after seeing such a huge amount of food.

Ayu also took a big bite of the chashu. She’s afraid of finishing it slower than Hikari. In the end, both finished the ramen at the exact same time.

It was very tasty, and the amount was just right for Ayu. She’s completely satisfied. An ordinary ramen shop that doesn’t need to line up is already this good. Tokyo is amazing.

“Phew, …tasty.”

Ayu drank some water and praised it in satisfaction. Hikari smiled happily.

“Ayu-chan, your appetite shouldn’t be underestimated. You’re indeed related to Mya-san.”

“Huh?”

“It means you can eat a lot.”

Ayu felt that she was saying, “you’re eating too much”. It was a bit embarrassing.

“S-Sensei is the same, right?”

“Yeah, I always eat more than other girls.”

Hikari admitted honestly and continued.

“So, I always can’t get a full meal when I’m shopping with my friends, …but I guess I’ll be fine with you.”

Ayu’s heart melted after hearing that.

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After lunch, Yukari and Ayu took the taxi back home. They put the stuff they bought in the living room before heading out again.

They went to a medium-sized supermarket that took around 5 minutes to walk to. Their goal is to buy groceries for tonight’s dinner.

Initially, Yukari wanted to say they could’ve just bought them on the ground floor of Takashimaya. However, she wished to bring Ayu to the nearest supermarket first.

“So? This is a supermarket in Tokyo.”

After entering, Yukari said that to Ayu.

“Nothing is surprising about supermarkets.”

Ayu said that in a slightly bored tone.

Yukari smiled and said, “That’s a shame.” She then grabbed a shopping basket.

“There are two stores that are somewhere between a convenience store and a supermarket, but they don’t have as much variety. So, I basically come here all the time.”

“I got it. …Oh, I’ll hold the basket.”

“I’ll leave it up to you.”

Yukari handed the basket to Ayu. Both of them walked shoulder-to-shoulder.

“Can I ask what sensei wants for dinner?”

“You can decide.”

Ayu pondered for a moment after hearing Yukari’s answer.

“…What goes along with grape wine?”

“Eh?”

“Didn’t you say you want to drink your leftover grape wine tonight? That’s why I want to make something that goes well with grape wine.”

“Hoho, that’s very considerate of you.”

Yukari praised and continued.

“Hmm, …there are all kinds of grape wine. I had a medium body red wine yesterday. Perhaps meat with a heavier flavor is better.”

“Meat, …aside from roasted beef, I’m guessing stewed beef or hamburger steak?”

“Yeah, stewed beef and hamburger steak go along. Beef Stroganoff and lasagna seem nice too.”

“I’ve never made those two before…”

Ayu felt a bit ashamed. She continued.

“Oh, but I think lasagna is just flat spaghetti, right? What about spaghetti with meat sauce?”

“I think that’s nice, but Bolognese sauce goes better than ordinary sauces, right? The sauce is meant to be partnered with grape wine.”

“Can I use that half-finished grape wine?”

“Of course, I still have a couple of bottles left. …The combination of the meal and the grape wine I’m drinking must be seamless.”

“Got it. Well, I’ll make Bolognese sauce and stewed beef then.”

“Hoho, I’m looking forward to it.”

After the dishes are settled, Ayu quickly puts the ingredients into the basket.

Ground meat, meatloaf, carrots, onions, potatoes, green broccoli, mushrooms, and celery. Aside from the ones used in dinner, she also grabbed some lettuces, cucumbers, cabbages, white radishes, and eggplants.

“This is the first time I’m buying so many veggies.”

Yukari said that as she looked at the basket piled up with vegetables.

“Does sensei hate vegetables? Your fridge is totally devoid of them…”

“Not really, but I’ll rarely buy them. It’s only for when I’m cooking.”

“You can at least eat a salad every day, right?”

“Salad, …it’s not fun to cut lettuce and put them into a plate.”

“Fun?”

Ayu looked puzzled.

“To me, cooking is a kind of entertainment. I don’t want to do it if it’s not fun. It’s more like I can settle with microwave food.”

“Cooking is entertainment, …I’ve never thought about that.”

Ayu mumbled in a deep voice.

*

After heading home, Ayu opened the fridge and put in the ingredients. Even though they purchased a lot of stuff, the huge fridge can take all of that in with no issues.

“Ayu-chan.”

Ayu put the veggies into the empty vegetable room. Hikari called her from behind.

“I’m taking a nap. Wake me up when the dinner’s finished.”

“Eh? Nap?”

Ayu turned around. Hikari took off her sunglasses. Her eyes are half-closed. It feels like she’s about to sleep immediately.

“I slept for around 2 hours only. I’m at my limit. Well, good night.”

Hikari dropped that and quickly returned to her bedroom.

She did stay up and work pretty late yesterday. She even slept in the living room and had to wake up at 7 AM. Her sleeping time was really short.

Despite that, she still introduced her home to Ayu and brought her shopping.

Sensei is so nice…!

She’s very thrilled as her heart warmed up.

Hikari has to taste something good for dinner.

Ayu made up her mind and exhaled.

*

“…Sensei, …sensei, …sensei!”

Yukari heard someone calling her. Her body is being shaken over the blanket. She finally opened her eyes.

The first thing she saw was Ayu’s face.

“Ah, …good morning.”

“…Sorry, you didn’t answer at all when I called you outside. That’s why I came in on my own.”

Ayu apologized. “Uh, …it’s fine.” She said that before taking a big yawn. At this moment, she can smell the scent of stewed beef. It’s stimulating her nose.

“It smells good. …Is the dinner ready?”

“Yes, I just have to bring them to the roof.”

“I got it. Let’s go.”

Yukari got off the bed after saying that.

“Wait, sensei!”

Ayu’s face flared up as she gasped.

“Eh? What?”

“Why aren’t you wearing anything below!?”

Below? Yukari looked down. There’s only a pair of panties. It must be because she unconsciously took off her socks and cropped trousers.

“Didn’t I have my panties on?”

Perhaps Yukari would be embarrassed if she took off her panties as well. However, she doesn’t feel anything when Ayu, also a girl, sees her panties. After all, she naturally showered in front of Ayu yesterday.

Yukari put on her home clothes and walked out of the room with Ayu.

They put the Bolognese spaghetti, stewed beef, grape wine, Caesar salad, and asparagus rolled raw ram onto the table on the roof.

“Hoho, it feels like we’re in a restaurant.”

“No, it’s not that amazing…”

“It is. You’re really amazing.”

Yukari praised the humble Ayu from the bottom of her heart.

Yukari basically finishes her dinner in one dish. It’s already incredible for her to see so many plates. Their placement is brilliant too.

Yukari took out her phone.

“Ayu-chan. Here, smile.”

“Eh!?”

Click.

She was confused when Yukari suddenly called her. In the end, her puzzled expression and the dinner were captured by Yukari.

“Wait, sensei!?”

“Relax, I won’t post it online.”

“That’s not the problem…”

Ayu pouted.

“Alright, let’s dig in before it gets cold.”

“Fine, let’s eat.”

Yukari followed Yukari and mumbled, “Let’s eat.” She picked up the spoon.

First, Yukari took a fork and started with the Bolognese spaghetti.

The sweetness of the beef and vegetables matches perfectly with the bitterness of the grape wine. Layered flavors are spreading in her mouth. Seriously, her cooking skills are worthy of being in a restaurant. At least the Bolognese sauce she made is on par with the chefs in Yukari’s old house. She’s not being polite.

After that, she took a sip of grape wine. The scent of the wine synchronizes perfectly with the Bolognese sauce. The wine seems to be tastier than yesterday.

“Phew-“

Yukari tasted the wine with the tip of her tongue before swallowing it. She can’t help but sigh in satisfaction. Ayu stopped and looked at Yukari nervously.

“H-How is it?”

Ayu asked tremblingly. Yukari smiled.

“Perfection.”

Ayu was relieved after hearing that. She mumbled, “That’s great…”

Yukari felt great too.

Yukari’s old house had several maids. Some were elite, while some weren’t. Compared to everyone she has seen in the past, Ayu is literally a precious treasure. She’s talented.

Ayu isn’t just good at cooking and considerate. The most important attribute is that she’s serious and worthy of pranks.

Mya-san really introduced an excellent “tiny helper” to her.

“-The stars are really beautiful.”

Ayu suddenly said that.

Stars? Yukari raised her head and looked at the sky.

Even though it’s not filled with stars, there aren’t tall buildings or bright lights nearby. It’s already quite nice to see such a starry sky in a city.

Right, come to think of it, we’re eating on the roof because the stars can be seen clearly.

However, by the way…

“…Although I said the stars are pretty clear here, aren’t the sky back in your home prettier?”

Yes, you can see stars in cities, but it should be better in the countryside, right? Not only did she not think about this, she even bragged about the sky here to Ayu. It’s a bit embarrassing.

Yukari smiled bitterly, but Ayu gently shook her head.

“…I don’t have time to watch the sky in my home.”

Ayu stared at the sky as if she were completely satisfied.

Yukari noticed that Ayu’s eyes, which reflected the stars, looked slightly wobbly.

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Ayu smiled gently.

Yukari stared at her smile. She can feel her cheeks heating up a bit.

Even though she just took a sip of grape wine.

This is unbelievable.

Chapter 5: The Progress of Reading is Especially Fast Before the Deadline

Ayu met the second morning after coming to Hikari's house.

The alarm woke her up at 6:30 AM. She washed her face, got changed, and immediately started preparing breakfast.

The dishes are white rice, miso soup, mirin fried cod, hijiki nimono, and the salad and egg rolls from yesterday. The cod was salted beforehand, while cheese fillings were added to the egg rolls at Hikari's request.

At 7 AM, the speakers in the living room played bird calls. A short moment later, Hikari walked out of her bedroom with her pajamas.

"Good morning."

Hikari greeted her sleepily.

"G-Good morning."

"Hmm."

Hikari slowly approached the dining table. She gasped in surprise after seeing the dishes on it.

"Today's just as much as last time."

"It's nothing amazing. …The salad is from yesterday too."

Ayu was telling the truth. She wasn't being humble. She's afraid of failure. Therefore, she always chooses what she usually makes in her home. The looks are very plain as well. She hopes that she can make something prettier to impress Hikari.

“It’s already more than enough. I’ve only eaten breakfast like this back home or when I went out.”

Hikari said that with a smile as she walked to the washstand happily.

*

“Thanks for the food.”

After breakfast, Yukari clapped her hands in satisfaction.

The taste and amount of today’s breakfast are perfect, especially the mirin fried cod. It’s very appetizing. It’s been a long time since she asked for a second bowl of rice.

Being able to enjoy this level of breakfast without doing anything is excellent. She just has to wait for the meal.

“Ah, it’s so tasty.”

Yukari praised from the bottom of her heart. Ayu’s face flared up after hearing that. She humbly said, “Glad to hear that.”

“Well, but if I’m so full in the morning, I’ll want to…”

“Hmm?”

“I’ll want to go back to bed again.”

“You’ll turn into a cow if you sleep right after you eat.”

“What cow? You sound like a grandma from the countryside.”

Yukari couldn’t help but tease Ayu after hearing such a cliché complaint. In the end, Ayu blushed in embarrassment. She mumbled “countryside” again.

…What hurts her is “countryside” instead of “grandma”.

It looks like Ayu is more embarrassed about her home than Yukari thought. Let’s be careful from now on.

Ayu stood up and took the empty plates to the sink.

Yukari also took her utensils to the sink.

“Right, do you want a dishwasher?”

Since Yukari is living alone, it doesn’t take much effort to wash her own utensils. However, it’s probably troublesome to wash two servings of dishes at once.

If only they bought a dishwasher at Yodobashi Camera.

“D-Dishwasher?”

Ayu looked very shocked for some reason. Yukari nodded.

“I don’t need that! I can just wash the dishes on my own!”

“That’s right, but isn’t it tough to wash all of them by yourself?”

“It’s nothing!”

“Really? Sure, …well, just tell me when you want it.”

Yukari walked back to her bedroom after saying that.

After entering the room, she yawned before falling onto the bed. Today’s breakfast is as nice as the ones in hotels. It turned her brain into full lazy mode. She has always emphasized following her sleepiness. Even though Miyako sent her a message to check her drafts, and she had to confirm them and answer Miyako before afternoon, she thought she could do it after waking up.

“Good night.”

In a moment, Yukari’s consciousness fell into a conformable deep sleep.

*

The dishes are done, the house is cleaned, and she finished doing laundry. Ayu sat on the living room’s sofa boringly.

What should I do? I’m already done with the work in the morning.

It’s not even 9 AM. This time is a bit too early to prepare lunch.

Although Hikari said it’s her free time after work, she doesn’t want to go too wild in an unfamiliar house. Freedom is surely hard.

She doesn’t know whether Hikari really fell asleep again. She has been staying in the bedroom after breakfast.

Come to think of it, she really knows nothing about Hikari’s work. Even though she’s a housework helper instead of a novelist assistant, it’s a bit problematic to not know anything about her employer’s job.

Ayu immediately grabbed her phone and searched “Hikari Kairou” online.

The first result is a Wikipedia page.

I wonder how it feels to have your own page on Wikipedia. She thought about that as she clicked the webpage.

Hikari Kairou is a novelist from Japan. She mainly writes light novels.

She received a 16th GF Bunko Light Novel Newcomer Award (hosted by GIFT Publishing House) with her <Searching for the Heart>. This marked her debut in GF Bunko (GIFT Publishing House). After publishing <Humans are Plagued by the Immortal Virus>, she wrote <Sun Tzu’s Art of Love>, <The Uncertain Chronicles of A Detective Who Can Sense the Intent to Kill>, and <I Reincarnated into a Handsome OP Protagonist Who Smurfs>

on Branch Hill Bunko (Branch Hill Publishing House). She's currently writing the <Everyone is Different, I Love Everyone> on Branch Hill Online.

"Hmm…"

Miyako said that Hikari is a famous novelist, but she didn't know any of the works above. Ayu doesn't read novels at all. All of the books she knows are from Japanese textbooks or the super famous ones.

She continued reading the article.

Nearly all of Hikari's works have manga adaptations. <Searching for the Heart> has a movie. <Sun Tzu's Art of Love> has a TV series. <I Reincarnated into a Handsome OP Protagonist Who Smurfs>'s anime was released from January to March.

Ayu has close to zero experience with anime, but she does watch TV a lot. However, she has never heard of these works.

She clicked into each novel's page and read the details. It wasn't until that moment she realized the cinema in her home didn't have <Searching for the Heart>. The TV and anime adaptations are only available in the capital area too.

The difference between cities and countrysides are so big that their amount of entertainment is different. It's upsetting.

Forget about that.

…Let's read sensei's work.

Ayu doesn't like reading novels. So, she wanted to start with movies and TV series first. There are a lot of Blu-rays in the storage room. Perhaps Hikari's works are among them too.

Ayu immediately paid a visit to the storage. The shelves are filled with Blu-rays and DVDs.

TV series, movies, anime, comedies, documentaries are all chaotically scrambled on the shelves. Naturally, erotic works are mixed in between too.

The placement doesn't have any order. Even the DVDs in the same series are thrown in different locations. The works include new releases, old stuff, Japanese dramas, overseas fantasy movies, Korean films, historical movies, Japanese films, Hollywood big hits, Bollywood movies, Chinese films, B-grade horror films, comedies, kid cartoons, AVs, yuri, yaoi, cosplays, etc. There are too many types of videos. At this point, instead of saying Hikari has broad interests, it's more like she just buys whenever she sees.

She found Episode 2 of <I Reincarnated into a Handsome OP Protagonist Who Smurfs>'s anime on this chaotic shelf. She reached her hand out to it. …For some reason, she ended up grabbing the anime next to it. The DVD box has two naked girls making love with each other.

She wondered how Hikari would feel after watching this.

"…The sunset is showering the after-school nurse room. Even though Yui knew she shouldn't do it, she still reached her hand into Saki's secret garden when she was asleep-"

She couldn't help but stare at the plot summary at the back of the box. A while later, she snapped out of it and put the box back onto the shelf.

After her face cooled down, she took the <I reincarnated…> and looked for other episodes and Hikari's work.

The least thing to do is to put Hikari's work in one place before watching the video.

*

11 AM. Yukari woke up from her dream. She can hear a couple of voices from the living room.

Ayu is probably watching TV, right?

“Stop that, Heart!”

“You little! I can’t believe you could do that to Pancreas!”

“Shut up! This is all because you love Kidney!”

“I also…I also loved Pancreas too!”

What’s with this retarded conversation? …She thought about that dizzily.

It sounds like an argument about love between a guy and a girl, but why is it about organs? Is it a story about personifying organs?

At this moment, Yukari suddenly realized it.

Wait, isn’t this the movie adaptation of my novel?

Yukari heard the conversation of a live-action remake of her debut novel, <Searching for the Heart>. This scene doesn’t exist in the original story. She only saw it once during the premiere 2 years ago. That’s why she couldn’t remember it at first.

She walked into the living room and confirmed the TV screen. Yep, Ayu is indeed watching the <Searching for the Heart> movie.

She’s afraid of bothering Ayu, who’s fully focused on the movie. Therefore, she silently sat on the dining table chair and awaited the end.

The movie has already entered its climax. The credits were rolling around 10 minutes later. However, Ayu remained still on the sofa. After the credits finished and the main screen returned, Ayu finally stood up and stretched.

She ejected the disc from the drive and turned around. It was not until then she realized Yukari was already sitting there.

“S-Sensei!? How long have you been there!?”

Ayu was shocked. Yukari smiled and asked her.

“Was it good?”

“Oh, yes! It’s very good.”

Ayu answered immediately. She can hear that she’s not just trying to be polite. She sincerely thinks the movie is good.

“This is sensei’s work, right? …Amazing, …you’re super amazing.”

Ayu didn’t hide her respect at all. Yukari couldn’t help but smile bitterly.

“…You shouldn’t treat that movie as my work.”

“Eh?”

Ayu was puzzled after hearing what Yukari said.

“How should I put it? It’s because this is…quite different from the original.”

Here’s the content of the novel version of <Searching for the Heart>.

The MC had a car accident and suffered a fatal brain injury. His organs (eyes, lungs, liver, pancreas, kidneys, small intestines, heart) were transferred to 7 other patients. However, for some reason, the MC’s consciousness woke up among these 7 people. Occupying someone’s consciousness caused them to be tortured by guilt. But, they still tried to live out their normal lives. After that, the 6 people, aside from the heart one met each other. They slowly grew closer. Finally, all of them decided to search for the heart, the only one with unknown whereabouts. The searching process was obstructed by mysteries. It’s a youth suspense novel.

The introduction during release was, “The MC, FMC, relatives, and rivals are all yourselves. A unique (transplant) youth suspense.” The “unique” was a wordplay of “transplant”. It gives off an arrogant “isn’t this wordplay amazing?” feeling. She doesn’t like it. However, from the author Yukari’s perspective, she thinks this introduction is pretty accurate.
[TL: The word for “unique” and “transplant” are both “ishoku”.]

In comparison, the <Searching for the Heart> movie has nearly no suspense elements. It’s centralized around romance. The “heart” mentioned in the title, a girl who received the heart transplant, is found almost immediately. Initially, the 7 protagonists share the same personality. Therefore, their tone and attitude are virtually the same. However, after the adaptation, the 7 people now have different features in their characters. Also, there are a lot of dramatic scenes like car chases and fighting that aren’t in the original.

Of course, fans of the original dislike the film. But, Yukari won’t say the movie is bad because it’s different from what she wrote. Instead, she thinks this is quite good as a romance.

It’s just that she still finds the movie adaptation being treated as her own work a bit repulsive.

Whether it’s good or not, an adaptation is an adaptation. It’s not just for <Searching for the Heart>. The Japanese show version of <Sun Tzu’s Art of Love>, the <I Reincarnated into a Handsome OP Protagonist Who Smurfs> anime, and the other manga adaptations are the same.

Only the novels are her work.

“Is it that different? I should read the novel too.”

After Ayu said that, Yukari chuckled and said,

“It’s fine. You don’t really have to see it.”

“Eh?”

Ayu is confused. Yukari smiled.

“It’s not that great, anyway. I have a bunch more books that are better. You should read those instead.”

Yukari wasn’t being humble or self-abasing. That’s what she truly thinks.

However, Ayu gently shook her head.

“I want to read sensei’s novel.”

“Eh?”

Yukari’s lips curled down. Ayu found this reaction quite unbelievable.

“Sensei doesn’t want other people to read your books?”

“Yes.”

“Aren’t you a novelist?”

“At least I don’t want someone I know to read it.”

“…?”

Ayu can’t understand. She grew even more confused.

“This is a subtle feeling inside an author’s heart.”

Yukari bitterly smiled and refused to explain more.

…Even though she doesn’t want the movie, anime, and manga to be treated as her own work, this is definitely not because she thinks the original is better.

To Yukari, her own novels and the adaptations are all the same. Countless books are better than hers. It’s just something with as many replacements as you want.

She welcomes unknown readers to enjoy what she wrote. However, she doesn’t want people she knows to waste time on novels like this.

Staff members like Miyako don’t have a choice. But, Yukari even went out of her way to tell her family and friends not to read it.

“…Can I really not read it?”

Ayu’s puppy eyes softened Yukari.

“It’s not like you can’t.”

Not wishing someone she knows to read it is just Yukari’s own issue. She has no right to stop Ayu if she still wants to read it.

“Well, I want to read it.”

Ayu stared at her directly. Yukari sighed.

“…Just a moment. I’ll go grab it.”

Yukari went into her studio after saying that. She took the <Searching for the Heart> novel from the bookshelf and handed it to Ayu.

“Thank you, sensei.”

Ayu’s tone was pretty excited. Yukari hastily added, “You don’t have to finish it if it’s boring.”

*

After lunch, Ayu immediately started reading <Searching for the Heart> in the living room.

The first pages are illustrations of the characters. However, none of them looks like the cast in the movie. Ayu is a bit confused. Strictly speaking, it should be because the actors and actresses don’t look like the ones in the book.

Anyway, the illustrations are very helpful.

She has heard this from Miyako before. Light novels (usually) are for people who are not used to reading real novels. To ease their experience, they (usually) include illustrations to help with the readers' imagination. Either that or they are used to heat up the plot.

This way, she thought she probably wouldn't have a hard time reading it.

She wanted to know more about Hikari with this light novel.

Carrying that expectation, Ayu started reading the main story.

A flash of light blinded my eyes. My entire body was struck. I flew out, and the back of my head hit the gravel road.

Pain and all sorts of feelings are quickly disappearing from my body. I don't even have the time to feel pain.

I can't even move my finger.

My sight is stained with bright red. I can see a few people and car lights.

Screams, yells, commotions, horns, and brakes can be heard from everywhere.

Ahh, I got hit by a car, right- I finally understood that.

I can feel that I'm probably going to die. It's because it's really cold right now.

The people and scenery I have seen in my 17 years of life- are quickly flashing in my mind. Near-death memories really exist.

Then, even these memories are slowly fading away. Before my consciousness departed, at the tail end, what I was thinking is-

"I hope someone finds the organ donation card in my wallet…"

This is a cold night.

My brain stopped working. My ordinary life ended without many achievements. …That should’ve been the case.

A month after the accident-

*

Yukari went back to the studio after having lunch. She found out that she had missed several calls from Miyako.

“Ah…”

Right, she totally forgot about the draft she has to reply to in the morning.

…Well, it counts as the morning before the lunch break ends.

She opened the file of the draft. Miyako and the editors asked her to make changes to some parts. This is the latest chapter of <Everyone is Different. I Love Everyone> publishing on Branch Hill Online every week. The release date is 12 AM tomorrow.

She stayed up all night to finish the draft. Therefore, a lot of parts needed to be checked. She spent more time than she expected. When Yukari finally finished and replied to Miyako, it was already past 4 PM.

…It counts as the morning before dinner, right!?

Yukari exiled the image of Miyako’s angry face away from her brain. She took a big stretch and stood up.

By the way, has Ayu finished reading it yet?

<Searching for the Heart> isn’t a thick book. A normal reader can probably finish it in 2 hours. I don’t know how she reads.

I wonder how she feels about the book.

There’s another reason why Yukari doesn’t want people she knows to read her book. She really wants to know how they feel.

Ayu was really thrilled with the movie. She’s worried. What if Ayu loves her novel?

Yukari left her seat and cautiously opened the door to the living room. She saw Ayu sitting on the sofa without moving an inch. Is she so drawn in by the book?

Yukari slowly walked to the sofa and went around Ayu to check up on her.

“……”

Ayu’s hand is still holding the novel. She’s sleeping with her eyes closed.

“…Uwah.”

She. Fell. Asleep.

Yukari checked which page Ayu was on. It’s on page 40, …which is at the start of the prologue.

She slept at the very beginning.

Yukari fell speechless for a while.

“Pfft.”

She couldn’t hold it and burst into laughter.

“Pfft, …ahaha.”

The situation was too unexpected. She was surprised and found this interesting.

The most important thing is- she never expected this to happen. It’s hilarious. Her teeth are going to fall from laughing too hard.

She never expected Ayu to fall asleep at the beginning. Yukari thought Ayu would be interested in it. She even contemplated what would happen if she fell in love with it.

“Hiya, I’m really…overestimating myself. Hahaha…”

Yukari laughed embarrassedly. Her face is as red as a tomato. During this time, Ayu opened her eyes. “Hmm…”

“Hoho, good morning, Ayu-chan.”

“Uwah!? S-Sensei!?”

Ayu bulged her eyes and looked around. Her eyes eventually focused on the novel in her hands.

“So, how’s my novel?”

Yukari asked with a mischievous smile. Ayu freaked out and answered.

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“Eh!? Ah, uh, well, i-it’s very interesting?”

Yukari giggled and suddenly took the book away from Ayu.

“Hoho, …you dare to sleep in front of the novelist herself? This is the biggest insult of my life.”

“Ah…”

Ayu looked at Yukari with a puppy’s begging eyes.

“I-I’m sorry! I’ve always wanted to sleep when I read long texts! I usually fall asleep on Japanese lessons, so it’s definitely not because sensei’s novel is boring-“

Ayu gave a hundred excuses. She’s at the edge of bursting into tears. Yukari gently smiled and patted her head.

“I’m just joking. I’m not mad at all. Instead, I appreciated it.”

“A-Appreciated…?”

“I mean, you can just be yourself. Whether it’s people who haven’t read my books or people who fall asleep after reading them. I’m truly thankful that they exist.”

“…?”

Ayu seemed to acknowledge that this is what Yukari sincerely thinks. So, even though she still couldn’t understand, her expression was relieved.

Yukari glanced at her and took the book back to the studio. Her hand remained in mid-air when she was about to put it back onto the shelf.

She flipped the book open and started reading it.

When was the last time I read <Searching for the Heart>? It was around 3 years ago, right? She read it once after getting the movie invitation. That was probably the last time.

This is the debut of her novelist career. It's also the first-ever novel Yukari has ever written. Right now, the writing seems a bit rusty. Some parts are clearly being forced. She was embarrassed.

However, the content is still interesting.

Yukari sincerely thought that when she was a third through.

It's still interesting.

The content is still interesting. The setting is slightly refreshing. Aside from that, everything is pretty plain.

That's the most sincere feeling Yukari has for <Searching for the Heart>.

"The settings are creative, the characters are lively, and the plot is very unexpected. Its completion level is extremely high."

"It tackled the extremely common 'who am I' question with an unprecedentedly unique perspective. This is a brilliant masterpiece."

Those are the comments she got from the Newcomer Award in GF Bunko. However, they must be exaggerating, right? She feels like the awarded novels in the past are much better.

"You're very talented! Please continue presenting era-changing masterpieces with me to everyone!"

"--!"

A passionate and sticky tone and a pair of eyes blinded by expectation came into Yukari's mind. She frowned and closed the book.

Yeah, I shouldn’t read my debut novel.

Yukari wiped the sweat off her body and put <Searching for the Heart> back onto the shelf.

She sat in front of the computer and prepared to work.

The draft of <Everyone is Different. I Love Everyone> can take a break for now. Let’s write <I Reincarnated into a Handsome OP Protagonist Who Smurfs> before dinner.

One is a harem game where the MC is hesitating between several of his fiancées. Another one is about the MC showing off after getting reincarnated into another world.

The novels she’s writing are, no matter who’s reading it can feel that “Hikari Kairou isn’t the only one who can write it”. Although it’s still interesting, there are as many replacements as they want. Nothing is particularly outstanding.

…By the way-

She has heard from somewhere that a novelist’s debut work represented everything about them.

Even though she’s not planning to treat a rumor seriously, if it’s true…

A novelist who writes stuff like “the MC, friends, lovers, enemies, and partners are all yourselves”-

-must be incredibly lonely, right?

Humans are Plagued by the Immortal Virus

Author: Hikari Kairou Illustrations: Shibugaki

Plot Summary

A mysterious virus suddenly erupted around the world. It forced humans to become immortal. The price is that all reproductive functions are lost. 50 years later, society has escaped the cycle of life and death. Humanity is slowly rotting away with a twisted moral perspective and social issues. Then, a girl stood up to end a world like this, to search for the original one, filled with love. “Death can make humans feel how precious life is. It grants us the power to be considerate to others!” Tomura Hanabatake, a talented and insane scientist fully devoted to this belief, invented weapons that can kill immortal humans. She soon started indiscriminate attacks around the globe-

Characters

[Tomura Hanabatake]

Protagonist. A genius scientist whose body is forever 17 years old. She has loved movies and online novels from the last era. To search for the beautiful society where life and death matter, she started carrying out terrorist attacks worldwide.

Settings

[Horai Virus]

A mysterious virus that grants humans immorality. It freezes the body to the moment it is infected and gives unusual regeneration abilities. The body can regrow even if there’s only a piece left. However, illness and external wounds will remain. Also, the virus can’t infect organisms aside from humans.

[Cinnabar]

A substance developed by Tomura. It neutralizes the Horai virus and removes immorality.

[Ubasuteyama] (Mountain of Abandoned Elderly)

A group of old people and severely injured patients who are abandoned by their family and society. They formed an organization and conducted research day and night to restore their normal lives. Therefore, their technology is very advanced to the frozen world. The group wants to take revenge on everyone who has rejected them. Tomura started working with them due to shared interests.

[Cult of Suicide]

A religion that views death as salvation. They worship Tomura as the messenger of God.

Chapter 6: The Progress of Tokyo Sightseeing is Especially Fast Before the Deadline

It’s been a week since Ayu came to Hikari’s house.

She slowly got used to her life. Now, she can walk to the nearest supermarket, bookstore, and station without relying on maps.

She also started referencing recipes and the internet to make more dishes. Currently, a day’s three meals consist of Japanese, Western, and Chinese food.

Today, the main dish for breakfast is hot-pressed toast.

After putting mayonnaise on it, she used the slicer that has always been slumbering inside the shelf to cut the boiled egg. Then, she mixed in some bacon, cabbage, tomatoes, and cheese. Finally, it’s the hot-press toaster that has never been used. The slightly burnt scent tastes different than an ordinary sandwich. It’s very appetizing. The crunchy crust is one big selling point too. You can always eat more.

“I didn’t know a hot-press toaster was this useful.”

Hikari enjoyed her coffee from the Dolce Gusto coffee machine as she said that in satisfaction.

“Eh? You’ve never used it before?”

Hikari answered Ayu’s question.

“I tried to make hot-pressed meat buns after watching an anime about high school girls going camping, but I got bored. I’ve never made hot-pressed

♂切前には
百合が捗る
私のクソみたいな人生は

toast before.”

“Meat buns, …it sounds quite tasty.”

There are a lot more recipes that use hot-pressed toasters too. Ayu decided to use it to its fullest on Hikari’s behalf.

“Right, Ayu-chan, do you have any plans for today?”

Hikari asked her after finishing her coffee.

“Not really…”

Ayu was planning to spend the day like usual. She reads recipes and manga after cleaning and doing laundry. Or, she’ll watch Blu-rays and kill time with the game consoles that arrived a couple days ago. Even though Hikari excitedly said to her that “My life is much better after Ayu-chan is here.” However, she has always been thinking about whether it’s okay to live her life out this relaxedly. …This sense of guilt is increasing by the day.

“Well, let’s head out together?”

“Eh?”

Ayu was a bit surprised at Hikari’s suggestion.

“W-Where?”

“Wherever you want. You’ve only been to Shinjuku and the area around the house after coming to Tokyo, right? Don’t you want to go somewhere else?”

“U-Uh…”

Hikari was too sudden. Also, she was very excited about going out with Hikari. In the end, her brain stopped working. Even though she always thought about where she should go and what she should eat after hearing about Tokyo in the news or magazines.

“Well, u-uh, …T-Tokyo Skytree!”

In the end, the first place she thought of was the most mainstream tourist hotspot in Tokyo. She’s very worried that what if Hikari is dumbfounded with such an exorbitant choice.

However…

“Oh, Tokyo Skytree? Nice!”

Hikari has an unexpectedly positive reaction.

“Come to think of it, I’ve never been to Skytree.”

“Really?”

Tokyo Skytree finished construction a few years ago. Ayu thought all people from Tokyo had already been there countless times.

“Yeah, I always said I’ll check it out when I’m free and the weather’s good. I ended up never going. A place that you can go to anytime is the last place you’ll visit. It’s like those games and Blu-rays I bought. They are just accumulating dust right now.”

“Really?”

Ayu grew up in an environment without much entertainment. It’s hard for her to understand things like that. If there’s a new shop or entertainment complex in her home, the nearby residents will definitely flock there.

“Well, …we’re going to Skytree.”

“Y-Yes!”

Ayu squeaked.

This isn’t like buying daily necessities a few days ago. Instead, they are going sightseeing together.

This is literally a date, right?

*

After Ayu finished doing laundry, the girls immediately went out for Tokyo Skytree. The fastest way from Yukari's house is taking the train to Oshiage Station, where the Skytree is.

Yukari put her SUICA card on the ticket gate sensor. She turned around and spoke to Ayu.

"We'll take the train to Shibuya and switch to the Hanzomon Line- eh?"

Ayu disappeared, even though she was just next to her.

She turned again. Ayu is standing in front of the gate and looking at her desperately.

Yukari quickly dashed to her and asked over the gate.

"What's wrong?"

"U-Uh, I-I don't have a ticket!"

"Ah-"

Yukari has always used IC cards her whole life. She never thought about buying tickets to ride trains downtown.

"You don't have an IC card? Like SUICAs or PASMOs?"

"I only have an IC e-card." [TL: It's an IC card from the Iyotetsu Company in Shikoku, which cannot be used in Tokyo.]

"Sorry, I've never heard of that one."

Ayu was probably talking about the IC card of her private metro back home. It probably can't be used in the Tokyo metro.

“Well, I’ll wait for you here. Go buy a ticket to Oshiage.”

“I-I got it!”

Ayu hastily dashed to the ticketing machine.

Normally, buying a ticket won’t take too much time. However, Ayu didn’t pass the gate until 10 minutes later.

“You took a while. Did something happen?”

Ayu cried out after hearing Yukari’s question.

“There are too many stations. I couldn’t find it at all. …Sorry for being a countryside girl.”

She bitterly smiled after seeing Ayu’s depressed expression.

“There are a bunch of lines in Tokyo metro. It’s very hard to understand. Even I’ll lose my way if I don’t have a switching app.”

Yukari gently patted Ayu’s head and said, “We’ll get you a SUICA card in Oshiage.” They walked to the platform.

*

Even though she made a big mess at first, no more trouble came up after passing through the gate. They arrived at Oshiage Station without much fuss.

Ayu’s eyes were locked to the district filled with shops upon exiting the station. They got to the plaza near the Skytree after passing the stores.

“Wow, it’s really impressive when we’re this close. It’s so tall that it won’t fit into the camera.”

Hikari raised her head and looked at the Skytree. She said that as she took photos.

Ayu also raised her head and answered dazedly. “Right.” It’s a 634-meter tall tower punching through the clouds. It’s so high that people can’t observe it directly.

“Anyway, let’s go up first.”

“Oh, sure.”

Hikari took a step forward after taking photos. Ayu followed her.

The line to the ticket office is very short, probably because of the weekday. It’s already Hikari and Ayu’s turn.

“One adult and one high school student, please.”

Hikari said that to the concierge.

“Please show your student ID.”

“Eh? Oh, sure!”

Ayu quickly took out her student ID from the wallet after hearing that.

The receptionist’s face immediately showed a tinge of a surprise after seeing the ID card. Perhaps it’s because Ayu looks wildly different from the photo on it. However, she didn’t ask for more details.

“Thank you. It’s 5,450 yen in total.”

“Eh? That’s expensive!”

Ayu answered with reflex. Hikari and the receptionist onee-san smiled bitterly.

“I-I’m sorry…”

Ayu blushed and apologized. The receptionist nodded.

Hikari smiled after they left the ticket office.

“You’re too honest. Sigh, but I know how you feel. 3,000 yen is a bit ridiculous just for a person to go to some observatory.”

After hearing her comfort, Ayu acknowledged that Hikari is a rich adult from the city. As for herself, she felt that she was just a kid who yelled expensive to 5,000 yen. This made her even more deflated.

*

They took the elevator and came to the 350-meter tall Tembo Deck before enjoying the view.

“Wow…! It’s tall! It’s amazing!”

Ayu put her hands on the railing and cheered loudly.

“Ohh…”

“Does Ayu-chan love tall places?”

Ayu answered Yukari’s question.

“Eh, …I’ve never thought about that. Maybe?”

“I love tall places too. I always get excited whenever I’m high, literally.”

“Exactly!”

Ayu’s tone is pretty joyful. She’s staring at Tokyo’s streets in pure excitement. Yukari thought she was as adorable as a puppy.

There’s a 360-degree glass wall on the Tembo Deck. They can see all of Tokyo. The girls enjoyed the view as they strolled across the path.

“That’s the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building. Meiji Jingu is over there. …So, I think my house is around that place too.”

Yukari pointed in the direction where her house was probably at. Ayu squinted her eyes and stared at that location.

“Hmm, …which one?”

“I don’t think you can see it. My house isn’t a big one, after all.”

Ayu seemed slightly regretful after hearing that from Yukari.

They continued moving forward.

“Ah! Sensei, it’s Mount Fuji! We can see Mount Fuji!”

Ayu screamed. Her eyes were brimming with energy.

“The weather is good today. It’s very clear.”

“That’s the first time I’ve seen Mount Fuji.”

Yukari was a bit envious of Ayu’s excitement.

She took a ride to Mount Fuji’s side before. Also, it looks even bigger when she’s on the Tokaido Shinkansen. Therefore, the tiny Mount Fuji here doesn’t impress her as much.

“Well, let’s go climb Mount Fuji next time.”

“Eh? Really!?”

“Sorry, I was just joking.”

“Eh…”

Ayu’s lips curled down. Yukari continued with a bitter smile.

“I’ve heard that Mount Fuji is pretty hard to climb for beginners. If you really want to go mountain climbing, I suggest leveling up on Mount Takao.”

“W-Well, let’s work our way to Mount Fuji together?”

“…It depends on my mood.”

She climbed Mount Takao two years ago under those mountain climbing manga’s influence. However, she didn’t feel the joy of it.

Perhaps mountain climbing will be pretty fun if she’s with Ayu.

She thought about that as she moved forward. The floor is now a 2 m x 3 m glass plane.

Yukari immediately stood on it and looked downward. The pedestrians are walking down there. This must feel like a god looking down on the humans. She’s excited.

Does it feel that much better just because the ground is transparent? Why don’t they just change all the floors to glass?

“Look, Ayu-chan. Humans are like garbage below. Isn’t it fun?”

For some reason, Ayu stood a bit far from Yukari. After she said that, Ayu shook her head. “N-No, thanks.”

“Eh? Why?”

“I-It’s because I, …uh, …I-I’m wearing a skirt! People down there can see!”

“Who cares about someone’s panties 340 meters up in the air?”

Ayu’s reasoning didn’t make any sense. She continued.

“Ayu-chan, don’t tell me you’re scared?”

“W-Why would I be scared?”

“Well, come here. There are observation decks outside of the Skytree, but not many places let you see from heights like this.”

Yukari said that and jumped a few times.

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Ayu dropped her jaws after seeing Yukari.

“Wait, sensei! What if it breaks!?”

“It won’t. This is thick, reinforced glass.”

“Glass is glass, no matter how thick it is!”

“Hmm, your trust in technology is very low.”

Yukari bitterly smiled. Ayu was genuinely angry.

In the end, Ayu still didn’t stand on the glass plane.

*

Taking the elevator from the Tembo Deck, they arrived at the sweeping city panoramas a hundred meters taller. The highest point in the Skytree has reached – Tembo Galleria (451.2 m). Ayu and Hikari took a photo here and returned to the ground.

Then, they browsed the gift shop on 1/F.

Aside from Skytree’s souvenirs, the shop always has Tokyo specialties and postcards of other famous tourists’ hotspots. Ayu can once again feel that she’s really in Tokyo.

“Ayu-chan, what gifts do you want?”

Ayu shook her head after Hikari asked her.

“I don’t really have anyone to give presents to. …Ah, but I should get something for Miya-chan.”

“Ah, …please don’t get anything for Mya-san.”

“Eh? Why?”

A vague smile appeared on Hikari’s face.

“…She’ll find out that I dumped all my work aside to play.”

“Eh? Wait, your drafts are near the deadline!?”

“Hmm, it isn’t that bad from my perspective. However, Mya-san will be very mad if she knows I went out to play. So…?”

“Ehh!? You still asked me to come with you in this situation!?”

Ayu freaked out. Yet, Hikari smiled genuinely.

“The more work that’s about to burn my butt, the more I want to play. Haven’t you accidentally started reading manga or tidying the room even though you should be doing homework?”

“I haven’t…”

Hikari dropped her jaw after hearing Ayu’s answer.

“Eh? Seriously? …Isn’t this a common mentality shared by all humans?”

“I feel bad for playing when I’m supposed to do work. It’s hard to have fun. …Shouldn’t you finish your work and then play without regrets?”

Ayu said something reasonable. However, for some reason, Hikari disagreed.

“I’m not so sure about that.”

“Eh?”

“I always say I’ll play video games, clean my room, and make some super delicate dishes after finishing the draft when the deadline is close. But, unexpectedly, after I finished it and gained freedom, I didn’t really want to do any of those anymore. In the end, I just drink in the morning and eat food I got from a convenience store before accidentally falling asleep.”

“Ehh…?”

“This is my personal opinion. The energy required for work is also shared by playing, cleaning, and traveling. That’s why you don’t have the mood to play after spending all of your efforts. In other words, the best time to play is before the deadline when you’re full of energy.”

“Hmm…”

Ayu’s confused.

“It sounds like an excuse from a lazy bone, …ah!”

Hikari smiled bitterly.

“You’re so straightforward, Ayu-chan.”

“I-I’m sorry…”

“It’s fine. I’m just a lazy bone.”

Hikari sighed and continued reminding her.

“Anyway, let’s not tell Mya-san about what happened today. Also, Mya-san should’ve already come here with her boyfriend. She doesn’t need souvenirs, anyway.”

“Indeed.”

Buying souvenirs from Tokyo to people living in Tokyo seems unnecessary.

“Wait, Miya-chan has a boyfriend!?”

Ayu suddenly screamed. Hikari quickly answered. “She does!”

“…Huh? But I don’t think they started going out for real yet…? Well, whatever.”

Hikari seemed to have mumbled something. However, Ayu was too shocked to hear it clearly.

I didn’t know Miya-chan has a boyfriend…

Come to think of it, it’s even weirder if a beautiful city girl like Miyako doesn’t have a boyfriend.

A girl in her best age should be going out with a guy. That’s the “normal” thing to do, right…

“W-What about sensei? Are you going out with someone?”

Ayu asked tremblingly.

She’d be devastated if she answered yes. However, Ayu couldn’t hold herself back from asking.

“Me? I don’t.”

Hikari answered in her usual relaxed manner. Ayu was honestly relieved.

“I don’t really have a thing for romance.”

Hikari smiled and showed a slightly lonely expression.

“…Oh, no. The thing I’m not interested in isn’t ‘romance’…”

“Eh?

Hikari smiled gently at Ayu’s confusion. “It’s nothing. She said.

*

In the end, they left the Skytree without buying anything. It’s around 12 PM now.

“Well, let’s get lunch, Ayu-chan. What do you want?”

“Ah, uh, hmm…”

Ayu started thinking about it after Yukari’s question.

“Is there anything famous in Tokyo?”

“Not really.”

“Eh!?”

Ayu gasped at Yukari’s quick answer.

“No, I’m serious. Even though there are a lot of good restaurants, and you can pretty much find what you want, I don’t think Tokyo has any specialties. …Well, I guess monjayaki sort of counts.”

“Monjayaki is that sticky and gooey thing, right?”

“Sticky and gooey…”

While Yukari bitterly smiled at such a lame description, she still asked her.

“Well, you want to have monjayaki?”

“Eh? Hmm…”

Ayu clearly looked like she wasn’t interested. With her expression, Yukari instead said she should always try something new.

“It doesn’t look good, but it’s really tasty.”

“Really…?”

“Yes, yes.”

“If sensei says so…”

After convincing Ayu, Yukari immediately started searching for monjayaki stores nearby. They went to the restaurant together.

They got seated. Yukari looked at the menu. Although she wanted to try new flavors like tomato, kimchi, and curry, she still chose the iconic mentaiko

mochi cheese with seafood for Ayu as her first time. They ordered oolong tea and beer for drinks.

“Sensei, you still ordered a beer when you have to work?”

Ayu looked slightly angry. Yukari smiled.

“Monjayaki and beer are a perfect match. It’s impolite to both monjayaki and beer if you don’t drink it.”

“You’re saying nonsense again…”

“It’s fine. Beer is just like water.”

“That’s impolite to beer, right…?”

Ayu sighed dumbfoundedly.

Their drinks and ingredients for monjayaki were quickly served.

Many monjayaki stores let the customers fry it themselves. However, this store provides full service. While frying it yourself is fun, but if Ayu doesn’t like how monjayaki looks, perhaps she’ll want to try it if someone makes it all beautiful.

The waiter skillfully stroked oil on the iron plate. The dough is cut, stirred, and fried with a small shovel. Aside from the “zzzzz” noise, the seafood and fried dough smell pretty good.

The monjayaki is already finished, just as they appreciated the waiter’s masterful skills. “It’s hot. Please be careful.” The waiter said that before nodding and leaving.

“It smells nice. …It doesn’t look as weird as the photos either.”

Yukari was very happy to hear that.

“See? Well, let’s dig in.”

Yukari used the shovel to pick up the steaming monjayaki. She took a bite after blowing on it a couple times. The broth-tasted dough melted on the tip of her tongue. It formed a very rich umami with the side ingredients and filled her mouth.

“Phew…!”

Ayu followed her and sent the monjayaki into her mouth, but it was too hot. Her face frowned as she was chewing.

“How’s it?”

Ayu swallowed everything after hearing Yukari’s question. She smiled and answered. “Super good!”

Ayu’s enthusiastic reaction was warm and adorable.

Yukari took another bite and drank some beer. Monjayaki and beer are really a match made in heaven. She can never get bored of it.

Even though Ayu kept saying it was hot, she finished it pretty quickly. The two servings of monjayaki immediately went into the two’s stomachs.

*

After lunch, they entered the Sumida Aquarium around the Skytree area.

There is a water tank below the floor, a dome for people to watch jellyfishes, and a goldfish area that looks like a festival. There are even tanks for spotted garden eels and splendid garden eels. As a whole, the lighting and showcase areas are specially designed. Also, there’s no fixed route. People can just walk around casually and have fun.

Walking with Hikari in a modern city-style aquarium, this is really a date, right?

Ayu bought a jellyfish keychain in the gift shop. Hikari bought herbal tea and some snacks made in the aquarium. After that, they left and walked to Asakusa.

Their destination is Kaminarimon- one of the most famous spots in Tokyo, along with the Skytree.

It only takes around 15 minutes to walk from the Skytree to Asakusa.

After passing the Azumabashi Bridge on the Sumida River, they arrived at Kaminarimon shortly afterward. That famous and enormous lantern came into view. “It’s really big.” Ayu said that leisurely.

“I’ve only visited here once when I was little.” Hikari said.

“Really?”

“Hmm, the lantern looks smaller than I remembered. Did it shrink?”

“It’s because sensei grew up, right?”

They took photos in front of the big lantern. After that, they ate ningyo-yaki and menchi-katsu in the Nakamise Shopping Street next to Sensoji before praying inside. The girls got on the train in Asakusa Station and returned home.

Although the Skytree and Asakusa are for tourists, luckily, both Ayu and Hikari had fun, even though she’s from Tokyo.

The duo returned to Hikari’s house just before 7 PM. Someone is standing in front of the entrance.

Hikari frowned and pretended to vomit.

“You still dare to give me that face…?”

The person is Miyako Shirakawa. She squinted her eyes and looked at the aquarium gift shop's bag in Hikari's hand.

"…You had fun, right? Sumida Aquarium? You even went to the Skytree?"

"Asakusa too. It's been fun."

Hikari smiled without hesitation. Miyako's expression froze.

"Glad to hear that. Well, I bet you must've finished your draft too, right?"

Hikari tilted her head. She smiled instead of answering.

"You haven't started, right…?"

"The deadline is tomorrow, right? Aren't you being too hasty running to my house before the deadline?"

"It's never too early to rush you. …Well, but I'm paying you a visit because I was dubbing at a recording studio nearby."

Miyako then looked at Ayu.

"A-chan, is everything okay here?"

"Yeah, I've had lots of fun."

Miyako smiled in relief after hearing Ayu's honest answer.

"I see. It's good that you're good."

At this moment, Hikari spoke up.

"Ayu-chan is a really big help. Her food is good, she cleans everything, and she irons all of the clothes too."

"Oh? I know A-chan is good at housework, but I didn't expect you to be this capable. …I wish you could help out in my house too."

Miyako's eyes were envious. Hikari laughed.

“Hoho, Mya-san’s life is pretty messed up too. Don’t just scold me. However, it’s too late for you to say you want Ayu-chan. I won’t give her to you. She’s already my wife.”

“Eh!? W-Wife!?”

Ayu was genuinely shocked as she blushed. Miyako smiled bitterly.

“Don’t say that. A-chan doesn’t understand the otaku world.”

It wasn’t until now that Ayu knew that it was a joke. How regretful.

“Well, I’ll be leaving.”

“Eh? Miya-chan, you’re not having dinner with us?”

“I still have a meeting after this. I’m just checking up on A-chan today.”

Hikari answered cheerfully after hearing Miyako. “Hiya, what a shame. I wanted to hand my freshly finished draft to Mya-san.”

“…I’ll still wait in your room if you don’t finish it by tomorrow. You better watch out.”

Miyako said that in a deep voice and left.

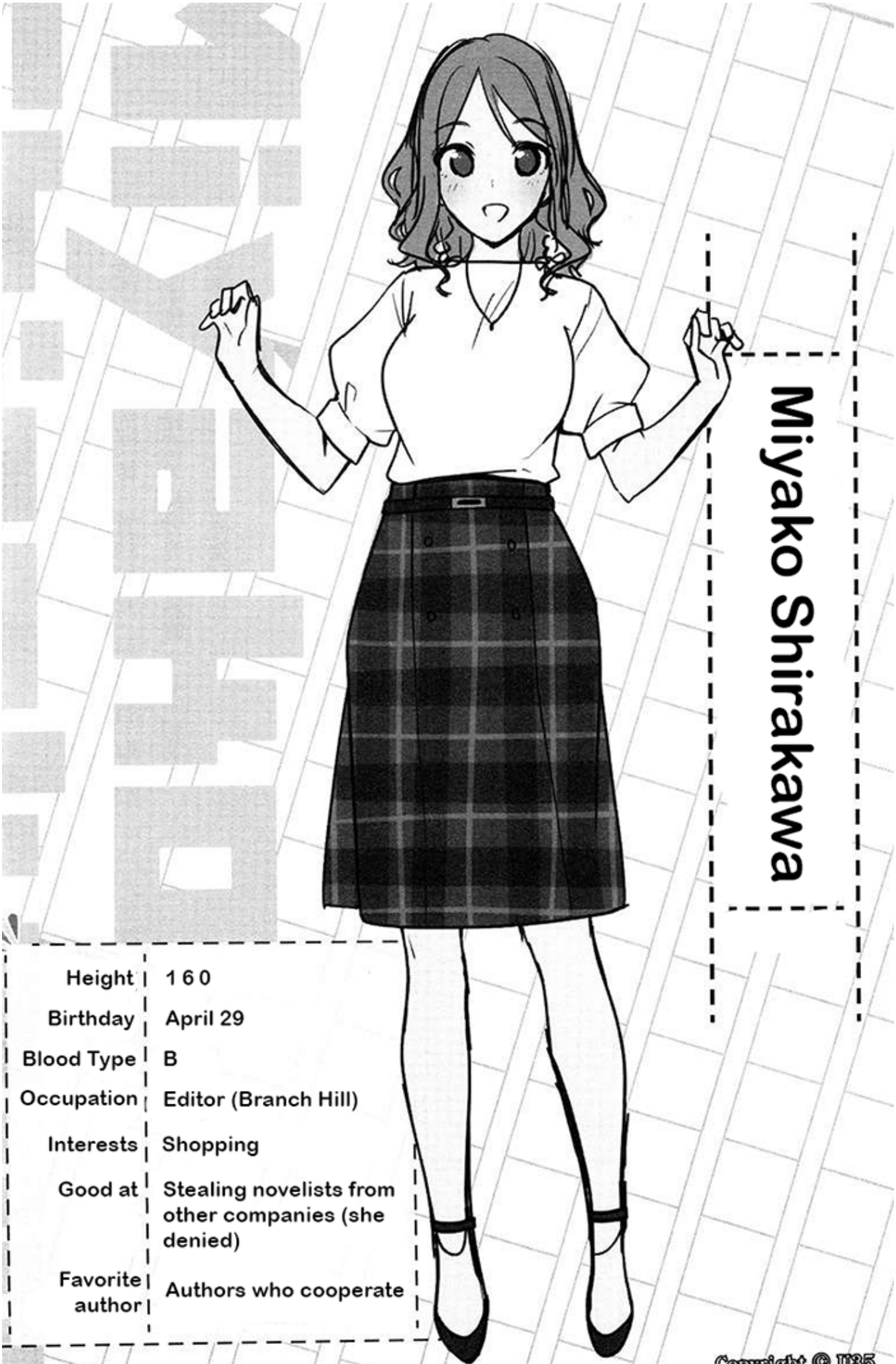
“Well, let’s go home.”

“Ah, yes.”

Ayu and Hikari returned to the room after opening the entrance door.

In the elevator, Ayu looked at Hikari’s face and thought.

I really want to be sensei’s wife-



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Chapter 7: The Progress of DIY is Especially Fast Before the Deadline

“Right, Ayu-chan’s room doesn’t have a storage shelf.”

It’s been two weeks since Ayu came to Hikari’s house.

One day, Hikari said that when she saw Ayu putting a couple of her finished manga back into storage.

“Ah, right, I don’t.”

The only furniture in Ayu’s Japanese room is a short table, chair, TV, and a shelf.

There are closets in the room, so the storage space is enough. However, all small things and books are put inside different Amazon boxes. It’s really inconvenient to find them.

“A shelf is better.”

“Yeah.”

Ayu agreed in honesty.

Aside from the inconvenience, such a plain room really makes her worried.

“Well, do you want to buy it or make it ourselves?”

“Make it ourselves?”

“Yeah, we make a shelf by ourselves, which is the so-called DIY.”

“DIY.”

She has heard of that term before. This roughly means “doing carpentry on holidays” from a person living in a city’s perspective.

“Is it that easy to make your own shelf?”

“It takes some effort to make a drawer or the formal ones with door cabinets. However, a simple shelf can be made almost instantly. The house has all of the tools we need.”

“So, sensei has made furniture before?”

“Honestly, I made the table in the studio room by myself.”

Hikari said that proudly. Ayu was very surprised to hear that.

The work desk in Hikari’s room looks very thick. It’s like those tables for a big company’s president’s room (in Ayu’s imagination). She always thought it was something high-class.

“Some of the shelves in the storage room are made by me too.”

There are a lot of shelves in the storage room. Steel plate frames, wooden shelves, and door cabinets. However, all of them are better than what’s sold in stores.

“It’s really amazing, but why are you making them yourselves?”

Hikari should be able to buy as much good furniture as she wants, right?

“The reason is the same as why I’m cooking and making models. Basically, a novel takes tens of days to finish. That’s why I want to do something that can achieve results in a short period for some reason.”

“So, in other words, you’re trying to escape reality?”

In the end, Hikari continued with a slightly sad expression.

“DIY is a creative task that lets me change my mood and improve my quality of life. It’s very beneficial, alright?”

“Alright, alright.” Ayu answered her half-heartedly and continued.

“But making a shelf yourself seems fun…”

Hikari smiled after hearing that.

“Well, it’s decided. Let’s start by choosing which one we are making.”

*

After the decision, Yukari immediately opened the furniture-designing software on her computer in the studio room. She’s planning to create a 3D model of the shelf.

“Which shelf do you like the most here?”

Yukari searched “shelf” by image and showed Ayu the screen.

Ayu looked at the screen as she scrolled up and down to compare the shelf photos in the results.

“Take it easy. You can just choose based on your feelings. We can just make a new one if you don’t like the end result.”

Yukari loves to both buy and make furniture herself. She always makes a lot just because she wants to. Obviously, she struggles to store them. However, whether it’s bought or self-made, Yukari can dispose of them without hesitation.

“Uh, …well, …this feels quite aesthetic.”

Ayu pointed at a shelf made with several square frames. It’s a 3-level stair that goes up from left to right.

“Oh? Our house doesn’t have that.”

The big premise for Yukari is that a shelf is for storing things. Therefore, she rarely chooses designs that focus on decorating the room and leaves quite a lot of space.

“Uh, is this not okay?”

Ayu asked in a slightly worried tone. Yukari smiled.

“It’s fine. It doesn’t hurt to make something like this sometimes. The procedure is more or less the same as a normal shelf. We can make a new one if you get more things.”

Yukari quickly created a 3D model after saying that.

“Amazing, …you’re really professional.”

Ayu praised her as she looked at the screen.

“This is just a software for DIY. It’s easy once you get used to it.”

This is something Yukari got for making a shelf with doors. She always creates really complicated furniture she isn’t going to make just for fun.

“There are a lot…”

“Aside from furniture, I also have software for architecture. It’s for creating a 3D house model.”

“Eh? You can build a house yourself too?”

“That’s impossible.”

Yukari smiled bitterly.

“I watched a Japanese show before. The protagonist is a designer. I bought the software because I thought it was interesting. This is for professional work instead of amateurs. So, it’s a bit luxurious. However, things are a lot easier when you have a 3D model of your novel’s characters’ houses.”

“Oh…”

Ayu nodded. She doesn’t look like she understands. Yukari bitterly smiled and came up with a model for the shelf.

After a while, a square frame shelf stair showed up on the screen.

“Is this alright? Each frame is 34 cm x 34 cm x 30 cm. It’s just right for A4-sized files.”

Yukari flipped the model and asked for Ayu’s opinion.

“Oh, …sure. …I think it’s great. …Can we really make this?”

“It’s fine. I told you it’s not that hard. Oh, right, what colors do you want?”

“We can paint the colors ourselves too?”

Ayu is shocked. Yukari nodded.

“The essence of DIY is that you can paint the colors you like.”

“You painted this table yourself too?”

Ayu pointed at Yukari’s work desk. This heavy table looks very antique. She didn’t expect Yukari to make it herself either.

“This is called colorant. It sticks into wood very easily and keeps the grain. Of course, we can also cover the grain with paint or use metal paint. It’s very reflective. There is also phosphorescent paint and whiteboard paint that magnets stick to. You can write or draw or it. There are endless possibilities.”

“Hmm…”

Ayu pondered about the options.

“Anyway, we can figure that out after visiting the store.”

*

Hikari brought Ayu to Tokyu Hands that they had visited a few days before.

They bought timber from the store based on the software's blueprint they came up with. The staff members helped them to cut the material into the right sizes.

When they were waiting, they thought about the colors in the painting section.

Ayu looked at the printed design and used her imagination. Finally, she decided the whole body would be pink with blue, glowing paint on top as drawings.

"How is it, sensei?"

She tremblingly asked Hikari about her own color choices. Hikari smiled and said, "It's nice. I think it's quite avant-garde."

Even though she doesn't know what avant-garde means, Ayu sighed in relief for the moment.

The girls returned home after buying the paint, varnish, and timber.

Ayu changed into her school uniform, while Hikari got into her coveralls. They don't want paint on their normal clothes. Recently, there have been a lot of beautiful coveralls for girls. Hikari's one is a very sharp yellow, making her look a bit flirtatious.

They brought the material and tools to the roof after changing. The DIY session is finally starting.

"Let's sand the timber first."

Hikari took an iron-shaped machine after saying that.

"What's that?"

“Sanding machine?”

“What?”

“Sanding machine. It’s just electric sandpaper.”

“We have tools like that…?”

Even though a lot more beautiful girls like DIY now, isn’t it already very professional to have something like this?

It doesn’t take much to operate this machine. Ayu also helped to sand after Hikari taught her how to use it. Compared to sandpaper, this machine easily peels the timber to a smoother state. The dust is all automatically absorbed as well. It’s very convenient.

After sanding everything, they had to mark a spot for screws and drill holes.

Hikari started by drilling a couple holes before handing the drill to Ayu.

“Don’t drill the wrong spot.”

The wooden plank is fixed onto the desk. She slowly put the head of the drill near the mark. Her index finger pressed on the switch. The high-speed drill pierced through the plank in seconds.

“Phew…”

“Nice one.”

Ayu released her finger, took out the drill, and sighed. Hikari smiled at her.

After completing the holes, Hikari switched the drill head to a screwdriver one.

They painted woodworking glue on it, locked the screws, and stuck the wooden planks together based on the design.

“Someone can always help fix the wooden plank when there are two people. It’s much easier.”

Hikari smiled and quickly put on the screws with the drill.

They made the shelf in less than 15 minutes. The real, wooden version of the 3D model appeared in front of them.

“Wow…”

Ayu was surprised.

I really made those shelves in the stores. Amazing. Also, it took a lot less time than she expected.

“My impression for DIY was always using saws and hammers.”

“Those are used sometimes. But, a newbie should get all of the electrical tools. Otherwise, it’s pretty easy to give up halfway through.”

“I see…”

Ayu thought a big part of DIY is saving money. However, hobbies like this are probably better for rich people.

“Alright, this can fit in small things or dolls. However, I don’t think it’s strong enough to be a bookshelf. Should we reinforce it with iron plates? Even though it’ll look not as good.”

“Oh, sure.”

Ayu accepted Hikari’s suggestion.

She’s planning to put recipes, magazines, and manga into it anyway. Perhaps even reference books for exams.

“Got it.”

Hikari took some L-shaped and T-shaped iron plates from the storage room. She fixed them onto the shelf with screws.

“Good. Well, let’s start painting.”

The drill is still in Hikari’s hand. She wiped the sweat on her forehead with the back of her hand.

“I feel like this is already as good as completed…”

Even though she said iron plates don’t look as good, it looks like part of the aesthetics after adding them. She hesitated about adding colors to the shelf based on her own taste.

“We can just paint varnish on it and call it a day. But I think that will be just a poor copy of the shelves in the search results. It’s only special when we paint it ourselves.”

Ayu made up her mind after hearing Hikari’s determination.

“…I got it. Let’s try.”

They put newspaper on the floor and moved the shelf onto it.

Hikari handed Ayu the pink paint spray they got in Tokyu Hands.

“Shake it and try to spray it onto the newspaper first.”

“Alright.”

She followed Hikari’s instructions and sprayed it onto the ground. The bright pink paint appeared on the newspaper and released a pungent thinner smell.

“I think it’s okay. Well, let’s do it for real.”

“Sure!”

Ayu nodded and sprayed it onto the side of the shelf.

The pale timber was immediately stained with pink.

This feels a bit, …no, very satisfying.

“Hmm, nice.”

Hikari said that with a smile.

*

After painting the inside of the shelf, the two returned inside to wait for it to dry. Then, they had their slightly late lunch.

The girls played a game about squids for 2 hours to kill time. After that, they came to the roof again. Yukari asked.

“So, what are you going to draw on it?”

Although Ayu suggested painting the whole shelf pink and drawing with glowing paint, they realized a problem during lunch.

The first one is that Ayu doesn’t really know how to draw. The second problem is that while Yukari knows CG and oil painting, it’s still very difficult for her to draw with paint without any drafts below.

Yukari thought they could only draw simple shapes like stars, hearts, and skulls. However…

“…How about palm prints?”

Ayu asked without much confidence.

“Palm prints?”

“Let’s print sensei’s and my palm prints onto it.”

“I see. It’s both a simple and unique pattern.”

“Well, let’s do palm prints.”

Ayu was very excited.

“But are you sure you want my palm prints? This is a shelf for your room.”

“How could you say that? This was almost all made by sensei. Of course, I need sensei’s prints!”

Ayu was unexpectedly stubborn about this. Yukari smiled bitterly.

“I got it. Well, let’s make the prints together.”

“Yes!”

The girls planned that the third level’s side is for Yukari’s hand, while Ayu is on the second one. After that, they started preparing the glowing paint and brushes.

“Ayu-chan, your hand.”

“Y-Yes.”

Ayu reached her right hand out. Yukari brushed the paint onto her hand.

“Eek! It tickles.”

Yukari also brushed some paint onto her left hand. Then, the two of them surrounded the shelf in front and behind.

“Well- on your mark!”

Yukari made the call. Both of them stuck their paint-filled hands onto the side. They released their hands a couple seconds later.

Their blue palm prints appeared on it clearly.

“We did it!”

Ayu’s tone was very cheerful. Yukari also smiled and agreed.

They stared at the palm prints in satisfaction for a while. Then, both of them quickly went to the washstand to clean their hands with baby oil.

It took another 2 hours for the paint to dry. Finally, they added varnish onto it and brought the shelf back to the living room after dinner.

The girls observed the shelf in the bright room. Even though some places looked weird, the weirdness created another sense of style.

Ayu stared at the shelf intoxicatedly. It looks like she's very satisfied.

"Do you like it, Ayu-chan?"

"Like!"

Ayu nodded with a bright smile. She then asked.

"But is it really okay? It took us a whole day just to make a shelf…"

"It's fine."

Actually, it's anything but fine.

The deadline for <Everyone Is Different. I Love Everyone.> is today, yet she's not even halfway through. That's why she tried to escape reality with DIY and change her mood.

If she didn't realize Ayu didn't have a shelf in her room before the deadline, Yukari would've probably just bought it online or at a home depot.

"I can probably never make a shelf like this. I'm happy. Thanks."

That's what Yukari sincerely thinks. Ayu's cheeks turned red after hearing that. She was a bit embarrassed.

"Well, let's move the shelf into your room now."

"Sure!"

They lifted the shelf and put it next to the wall of Ayu’s room-

“Ah…”

Yukari smiled stiffly.

Tatami with paper doors. The windows are also made with paper. The wall is sand. A scroll is hung on the niche. Then, there’s a short table with a wooden texture.

Ayu’s room is a classic Japanese room, yet Yukari didn’t consider this.

A calm and collected Japanese room now has a pink shelf with glowing blue palm prints. It’s so shockingly wrong.

“…How should I put it? It’s super…eye-catching.”

Ayu bitterly smiled as she expressed her thoughts.

“Sorry, …I should’ve noticed it. Let’s repaint the colors tomorrow? Or should we make a different one?”

Ayu was genuinely shocked after hearing that. She said.

“There’s no need at all!”

“Eh?”

“Isn’t being super eye-catching just right? It has a very strong presence, right? Or should I say chic in its own way? Anyway, I think it’s great!”

Ayu tried her best to explain. Yukari was still surprised.

She doesn’t seem to be saying that to comfort Yukari. She sincerely thinks it’s fine to have a shelf like this in a Japanese room.

“I see. …Indeed, the liveness is more apparent in a Japanese room.”

“Yes!”

Ayu nodded with a smile. Yukari also laughed too.

Yukari observed the shelf detailedly again.

She made this with Ayu with their palm prints on it.

She could always throw furniture away in the past, whether she made it herself or not. However, even though this shelf isn’t great compared to what she had made, she wants to keep this in her home forever.

Sun Tzu's Art of Love

Author: Hikari Kairou Illustrations: Minami

Plot Summary

Kotetsu Takeda is an ordinary worker whose age is equal to the number of years she has been single. She has feelings for one of her colleagues. Being unable to confess her feelings, Kotetsu always feels slumped. Then, one day, a suspicious girl who calls herself "the assistant of love" appeared – Sonko Tennoji. Sonko claimed that she's the descendant of the ancient military strategist Sun Tzu. Kotetsu followed her suggestions and slowly closed the distance between her and her loved one. However, Sonko actually has other motives-

Characters

[Kotetsu Takeda]

A 26-year old employee. She's the protagonist and the narrator. Her name and tone always cause confusion about her gender among readers. However, she's a girl in love with her colleague Yu Okubo.

[Sonko Tennoji]

She claims to be the descendant of Sun Tzu, an assistant of love with blonde hair and blue eyes. Female protagonist. She loves Kotetsu. Her plan is to eventually go out with her by giving her love suggestions.

[Yu Okubo]

Kotetsu's colleague. A beautiful OL. A perfect superwoman with both looks and qualities.

[Kotaro Ito]

He's as handsome as Kotetsu. On the surface, he's an annoying rival who has his eyes on Yu. …However, his actions are based on his fondness for Kotetsu. Readers always reread after knowing Kotetsu's gender. It's very easy to find that he's clearly a tsundere.

Chapter 8: The Progress of Fishing is Especially Fast Before the Deadline

“Do you want fish for lunch?”

It’s a day in late May. Hikari suddenly threw out that question while having breakfast.

“Fish?”

Ayu asked.

“Like salt-grilled rainbow trout, for example.”

“Sure, I can make it if sensei wants.”

The nearby supermarkets have rainbow trout in stock every day. However, if it’s salt-grilled, Ayu thinks coho salmon tastes better. That’s why all rainbow trouts she buys are supposed to be eaten raw.

“Well, it’s decided. Let’s leave after eating.”

Hikari smiled and suggested. Ayu was dumbfounded to hear that.

“Right now? The supermarket opens at 8:30, right? Also, I’m not sure if the store has it this early…”

“Hoho, we’re not going to the supermarket.”

…In the end, Hikari brought Ayu to a fishing ground that took an hour and a half to arrive by train.

“It’s always so sudden every time…”

Even so, Ayu doesn’t hate being unexpectedly messed around by Hikari.

This fishing ground is built on top of a stream. The types here are mostly rainbow trouts. It’s surrounded by abundant greenery. The swooshing grass and bird calls can be heard everywhere.

Ayu was surprised to know that a place like this exists in Tokyo.

“The fishing ground near our house is quite fun too. But, yeah, you just have to go fishing in nature.”

Hikari took a deep breath and told Ayu.

She’s wearing sunglasses, a straw hat, hoodie, shorts, underpants, and heeled sandals.

Ayu’s showing very little of her skin to avoid getting hurt. She’s wearing a long sleeve top, jeans, and sports shoes.

The fishing rod and bait can be rented inside the place. So, the only tool they brought was a small fridge for bringing their prizes home.

Hikari paid the fee at the desk. They rented bamboo rods, hook pullers, and fish cages.

“Ayu-chan, do you want grape rootworms or salmon roe as bait?”

“I want salmon roe!”

Ayu immediately answered. Even though she doesn’t know what grape rootworms are, they must be an insect, right?

“You’ll have an easier time with grape rootworms.”

“I. Want. Salmon. Roe!”

Hikari smiled bitterly after seeing Ayu’s determination. Then, she said to the staff, “I want a pack of salmon roe and grape rootworm.”

After that, the staff member brought plastic containers with salmon roe and some tiny larvae. Also, the larvae are moving.

Seeing the bugs within her expectation, Ayu was sincerely glad to choose salmon roe.

*

The girls walked inside the fishing ground after getting the tools.

The fishing ground is split between areas that use real bait, fake bait, flies, and a special one for beginners. This time, they chose the normal real bait area.

A lot of rainbow trouts are swimming around in the stream.

It’s a weekday, so not many people are around. They are free to choose places that have a lot of fish around.

“This should do.”

Yukari observed the stream. She immediately untied the fishline on her rod after finding a nice place. She took a grape rootworm and impaled it on the hook.

“Uwah…”

Ayu frowned deeply. Yukari gave her a bitter smile.

“It’s okay once you’re used to it.”

Yukari initially thought grape rootworms were disgusting, but she quickly understood that they were just used as bait.

Ayu was about to put the salmon roes on the hook too.

“How many do I need?”

“Around two, I guess. Don’t let the insides leak out. Try your best to hook the skin only.”

“I got it.”

Yukari continued after Ayu hooked the salmon roes.

“Well, let’s start fishing. Aim it. Swing the rod around the fishes.”

Yukari aimed her fishing rod at a place full of rainbow trouts and threw it gently. The hook fell into the water.

Ayu distanced herself a little bit away from Yukari and threw the hook out too.

After a while, the buoy at the top of Yukari’s fishing rod was suddenly pulled into the water.

“Oh.”

It looks like the fishes are really taking the bait easily.

She waited a couple of seconds instead of immediately pulling the fishing rod. The fish had to bite the entire bait and hook.

She was met with very strong resistance as she was reeling in.

“I got it!”

“Eh? That fast!? Incredible!”

Ayu praised Yukari.

Yukari used all of her strength to lift the fishing rod. However, the rainbow trout is dragging so hard to escape. This feeling of battling with the fish is quite satisfying.

If she attempted to lift it forcefully, the line or rod would break. Therefore, she carefully and steadily pulled the fish above water.

“Hiya!”

She grabbed the opportunity and raised her hands. The fish flew out of the water with some splashes in the end.

Yukari reeled in her line. Then, she showed Ayu a nearly 30 cm long rainbow trout that’s still struggling.

“Look, Ayu-chan! Yay!”

“You’re amazing!”

Yukari was flattered by Ayu’s praise. She pulled the fish away from the hook and into the cage.

*

It’s been 30 minutes since they started fishing.

Things went well for Hikari. She already got 4 fish.

However, Ayu still hasn’t got a single one. A fish did take the bait one time. However, she lifted the fishing rod too hastily. In the end, the fish bit and took the bait away.

She tried switching places or hanging 3 roes at once, but none were effective.

She thought she would be happy enough to travel with Hikari. However, it doesn’t seem satisfying if she can’t get any fish. Perhaps her emotions are written on her face. Hikari moved closer.

“Hmm, maybe the fish grew immune after a while.”

“Immune?”

“The fishes that take the bait immediately are all gone. Only the very cautious ones are left, or it’s because they know the salmon roe is a trap after taking the bait once.”

“Are fishes this smart?”

“You didn’t expect that, right?”

“Ugh…”

Ayu glared at the rainbow trout swimming freely in the stream.

“But sensei got something.”

“Yeah, it’s probably because of my bait.”

“Those worms…?”

“Rainbow trouts love grape rootworms. Those who don’t react to salmon roe will take the bait too.”

“Ugh…”

Ayu was very troubled by what Hikari said.

She’s frustrated that she can’t get any fish since it ruins the purpose. However, she really doesn’t want to touch those worms, not to mention hooking them.

“Hoho, enjoying nature is also part of the fun of fishing. I’ll fish your lunch for you. Relax.”

Hikari seems to be teasing her. Ayu decided to go wild.

“No, thanks! I’ll get my own meal! So, uh, …p-please give me grape rootworms…!”

“Haha, I like your determination, Ayu-chan.”

Hikari took the container with grape rootworms.

Ayu took off the salmon roe on the hook. Hikari opened the container and handed it to Ayu.

“Here.”

“Ugh…”

She reached out her trembling hands, but she struggled to touch the squirming worms.

“…Do you want me to help you?”

Hikari seems a bit moved to help her.

Actually, Ayu wished she could’ve accepted this suggestion. However…

“No, I’ll do it myself…!”

Ayu gritted her teeth and finally pinched a worm up with her left hand. The squirming feeling from the fingertips is really disgusting.

Hikari praised her.

“Stab it in the tail and along the body until the hook pierces the head.”

“Okay…”

Ayu followed Hikari’s instruction and stabbed the hook inside the worm. The hook seemed as if it was sucked inside. It pierced through the head successfully.

“Wow, that’s a good one for a first-timer.”

“…I-I’m pretty good at sewing.”

Ayu replied to Hikari’s praise with a stiff smile.

*

Ayu immediately became successful after using the grape rootworms.

She threw the line and waited for a moment. The buoy suddenly sunk into the water as the line was dragged.

“Sensei! It’s pulling! It’s pulling!”

Ayu screamed in shock.

“Calm down. The line will break if you pull too hard. Slowly raise the fishing rod, okay?”

“Got it!”

Ayu slowly dragged the fishing rod upward with a nervous expression. Finally, the rainbow trout made a splash and flew out of the water.

“A-Ah!?”

The fish was struggling intensely and made Ayu yell in pain. However, she still reeled the line in slow-mo and grabbed the fish. Even though she’s afraid of bugs, live fish don’t seem to be a problem.

“Sensei! I did it! I got one!”

Ayu brightly smiled as she showcased the struggling rainbow trout in her hand to Yukari. “Congrats.” She laughed and sighed in relief.

It would be a bit too bad for Ayu if she brought her to such a far fishing ground without getting anything aside from a disgusting memory.

“Well, let’s take the hook off.”

Yukari got close to Ayu with the hook puller and reached it inside the fish’s mouth.

“Hehehe…”

Ayu held the fish with both of her hands and smiled.

“Sensei, fishing is pretty fun.”

Yukari felt a tinge of warmth in her heart after hearing that.

*

Ayu got another fish later. After that, they wanted to have lunch first, so the girls went to the grilling area in the fishing ground.

Hikari and Ayu got 6 rainbow trouts in total.

The staff in the fishing ground also assisted in processing the prizes they got. They also helped to spray salt and strung the fishes together. The girls grilled the fish skewers and enjoyed them together.

Perhaps it’s because they fished it themselves. Even though it’s just a simple grill with salt, it tastes better than anything they had tried before.

They only have the salted rice balls from the station store aside from the fish skewers. However, the rice balls are delicious too. It’s a perfect match with salt-grilled rainbow trout.

The girls started fishing again after eating 3 each. It only took 3 hours for them to get over 20 fish. It’s illegal to release what you got back into the stream here. Therefore, they have to clean everything and put the fish into the mini-fridge.

“I think we got too much.”

Hikari bitterly smiled after looking at the mini-fridge between her legs on the train home.

“I guess we have to eat rainbow trout every day for now…”

After hearing Ayu, Hikari frowned in sadness. “Eh?”

Even though the salt-grilled fish they ate is perfectly delicious, Ayu doesn’t want to eat salty things.

“I’ll look up more recipes for rainbow trouts.”

“I’m looking forward to your cooking.”

Hikari yawned after saying that.

Ayu followed her yawn too. She didn’t notice when they were fishing. However, her stamina is more exhausted than she expected.

Both of them failed to resist their urge to sleep. Their shoulders leaned together, and they fell asleep just like that. In the end, they went past a couple of stations.

Later, all of the rainbow trouts were deep-fried. Tempura, Nanbanzuke, assorted cooked rice, smoked and Italian-boiled fish, you name it. The girls put all of that into their stomachs within 3 days.

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The Uncertain Chronicles of A Detective Who Can Sense the Intent to Kill

Author: Hikari Kairou Illustrations: Udatsu

Plot Summary

The MC, Zenichirou Katori, is a police officer. He has a special power to sense the residue intent to kill in a location. In other words, he's a kill-intent detective. This ability of his helped him catch many criminals and prevent many crimes. One day, Zenichirou went to a mansion party deep inside the mountains as a security guard of some important people. However, all of the residents and guests in the mansion are flagged as suspicious. The house is filled with a suffocating sense of blood and intent to kill. There's not only one person who wants to execute their plan to kill in the house. It's a lot of people. Can Zenichirou prevent all murders ahead of time?

Characters

[Zenichirou Katori]

A 32-year old police officer. He has superb senses among kill-intent detectives.

[Shigeo Gouma]

A billionaire. He built a mansion filled with traps to murder all guests.

[Golbeza Tanaka]

The butler of the mansion. He modified the traps in secret to plan out his murders.

[Kitarou Nakamura]

Politician. Serial killer.

[Aldebaran Yamada]

Gouma's golf friend. Hitman.

[Fujiko Murai]

A beautiful woman. Serial killer.

[Senmemaru Yazawa]

A beautiful girl. Serial killer.

[Druid Konan]

A serial killer who can sense the intent to kill.

Chapter 9: The Progress of Bending Time and Space is Especially Fast

The morning of June 1- a couple of days after Ayu and Hikari went fishing.

“It’s June today.”

Ayu brought that up during breakfast.

“What are you talking about, Ayu-chan? It’s May 32 today.”

Hikari said that with a completely serious face.

“Eh, …sensei?”

“It’s May 32 today.”

Hikari repeated that calmly despite Ayu’s confusion.

Ayu suddenly realized something just as she was about to say, “What are you talking about?”

“…Are you dragging your drafts again?”

“I’m not. It’s still May right now.”

Hikari’s tone is gentle yet contains a sense of unrefutable determination. Ayu could only follow up with a bitter smile.

“Alright, alright, it’s May 32 today.”

“Glad you can understand me, Ayu-chan.”

…For Ayu, she can easily shrug it off with a bitter smile. However, obviously, as her editor, Miyako won’t tolerate Hikari’s BS.

“Don’t you even think about taking a step out of your house before finishing your draft!”

Miyako Shirakawa dashed into the house at 10 AM.

Miyako’s pressure made Hikari feel that her collarbones would really break if she rebelled. Therefore, she chose to sit in the studio obediently.

“…Miya-chan, is sensei’s draft needed that badly?”

“Yes.”

Miyako answered with a stern face.

Miyako said the draft Hikari is dragging is releasing in June- this month. It’s the latest volume of <I Reincarnated into Handsome OP Protagonist Who Smurfs>. The illustrations are already finished, and it’s already available for pre-order in bookstores.

If she’s dragging the draft for <Everyone is Different. I Love Everyone>’s web novel, the worst scenario is a short hiatus. However, the loss is immeasurable for a draft that’s about to be released in a physical copy.

Sensei, you still went fishing in such a horrible situation…?

Even though Ayu didn’t know the deadline, she thought she must be an accomplice since they went fishing together.

Ayu’s expression turned stiff. Miyako called her in confusion. “A-chan?”

“I-It’s nothing.”

Miyako squinted her eyes and stared at Ayu, who kept averting her eyes.

“I bet she went out to play when the deadline is burning her butt, right…?”

Ayu asked Miyako tremblingly.

“Miya-chan, …won’t sensei lose her job if she keeps slacking off?”

Although she’s not familiar with how society works, people who keep skipping work to play will be fired normally, right?

Miyako showed a slightly annoyed expression.

“Sigh, authors aren’t part of the publishing house, so they won’t be fired. However, authors with bad records or had caused serious problems will be blacklisted sometimes.”

“T-Then, will sensei…!”

Ayu was very terrified. Miyako bitterly smiled.

“Relax, right now. It’s next to impossible.”

“Eh? Why?”

“Hikari Kairou is a popular author. She still brought us a lot of revenue despite the troubles she caused for the company. However, aside from that, the most important reason is that I love her.”

“Eh-“

Ayu turned speechless. Miyako continued.

“…I love her novels. So, I’ll apologize for any troubles Hikari caused for other people. As long as she wants to continue being a novelist, I’ll try my best to protect her position. …Actually, I’m trying my best to suppress the urge to break her collarbones and hang her naked body upside down above the publishing house’s roof.”

Miyako’s tone was very calm, but her eyes were series. Ayu looked at her dazedly.

Miyako noticed Ayu’s look and smiled embarrassedly, “Don’t tell that to Hikari.”

“Well, but I bet that idiot noticed how I feel like right now. She just likes to do whatever she wants sometimes and see where the line of other people are.”

…Even though Miyako realized that already, she still swore to protect Hikari. Ayu genuinely feels that Miyako is amazing.

While Miyako’s feeling toward Hikari isn’t love, you can still feel that their relationship is very special.

Ayu is weirdly envious of this.

I Reincarnated into Handsome OP Protagonist Who Smurfs

Author: Hikari Kairou Illustrations: Moshira

Plot Summary

The MC reincarnated into a handsome OP protagonist who smurfs. After some misadventures, he became a popular guy everyone could rely on.

Characters

[Claude Berhard]

A young man (20-year old college student) passed away in an accident. He reincarnated into a character of a fantasy shoujo game. This particular character is the heir of a noble family. He is good at swords and magic. A sidekick of the MC. He was originally going to defeat the demon lord, but after all kinds of accidents, he passed up the role to the MC and died. However, the young man used his knowledge of the game and robbed the EXPs and items that the MC would get. After that, he made his name known and became a hero better than the MC.

[Arthur Quraysh]

A teenager who left his home to become an adventurer. He has incredible potential and grew up at an impressive speed on the way. The original MC of the game.

[Lean Bell Astarte]

The princess of the kingdom. She's one of the FMCs in the game. Even though she's supposed to be the fiancée of Claude, she's attracted by Arthur.

[Iserina Finnell]

A female knight. The second FMC in the game. She's attracted by Arthur.

[Marie Quraysh]

Arthur's little sister.

[Berbet Harmonics]

A female assassin.

[Misty Survein]

A female mage.

Chapter 10: The Progress of Birthday Celebration is Especially Fast Before the Deadline

June 25. It's been around a month and a half since Ayu came to Yukari's house.

Today, Yukari’s house received bouquet after bouquet.

“Did you buy a bunch of stuff online impulsively again? Isn’t this too much…?”

Ayu asked in shock after seeing all the bouquets on the table.

“I didn’t. My family gave it to me. These are from my parents and siblings.”

“If I remember, sensei has 4 siblings, right?”

“Yeah, my oldest brother is 20 years older than me. The oldest sister and second brother are twins 17 years older. The youngest sister is 15 years older.”

“You guys have that much of an age difference!?”

“It’s because we have different mothers. My siblings are all from the original mother while I’m a kid of the so-called mistress.”

“Eh? Ah…”

Ayu felt a bit awkward after hearing that.

“Relax, even though my mom’s a mistress, she’s approved by my aunt, which is the first wife. They are quite close. Auntie is pretty nice to me.”

“Glad to hear that. …I thought you are bullied like those mistress’s children in dramas.”

“It’s not even like that. Everyone in the house is literally all spoiling me.”

Even though a mistress’s child can’t appear in formal social events or take over the family’s business, Yukari is more than happy about it. She just needs to enjoy her wealthy life without any constraints. The responsibility of a rich family isn’t placed on her. She confirmed her debut as a novelist during high school. While it was quite sudden, the whole family still blessed her.

“…Nice family.”

Ayu felt a little deflated after that praise. She covered it up by speeding up her speech.

“Well, why did your family send you flowers then? Is it to congratulate your new book’s release?”

“Oh, it’s my birthday today. 23 years old.”

“Ehh!?”

“They’ll probably send me real gifts in some other way. Basically, it’s all travel vouchers or membership cards for restaurants. But it feels quite emotionless with just a paper or file alone. That’s why they always send me flowers as well. Also, my family really wants some long-lasting bouquets. I’m always struggling to place them.”

She’ll keep the flowers until the next year if she likes them. However, most of them are gifted to the editing department or friends.

Her family mainly gives her vouchers and coupons. The reason is that Yukari banned them from giving her any property, vehicles, precious metals, large pieces of furniture, artworks, clothes, checks, or cash. Super high-class utensils and glasses are included in artworks too.

“We can go to a nice restaurant next time- hmm?”

Yukari noticed Ayu looked pretty upset. She asked dumbfoundedly.

“What’s wrong, Ayu-chan?”

“…I didn’t prepare any birthday presents.”

Yukari gently smiled after hearing Ayu’s deflated answer.

“It’s fine. You always cook good food for me.”

“But birthdays are special. I should just, …no, I can’t really afford anything amazing.”

“Well, I hope for a birthday cake and a more luxurious dinner.”

“…I got it. I’ll try my best.”

Ayu nodded, but she still looked a bit sad.

“Right, when is Ayu-chan’s birthday?”

“June 1.”

“It’s already over!”

Yukari bulged her eyes after hearing the answer.

“Why didn’t you say it? I would’ve celebrated it with you.”

Ayu pouted.

“It’s because sensei keeps saying ‘it’s May 32’ on that day…”

“Ah.”

Right.

She kept dragging her draft, which was supposed to be finished in late May. In the end, she chose to bend time and space instead. That’s a common trick up a creator’s sleeves.

…Moreover, there are 36 days in Yukari’s version of May.

“Ahaha, …I-I remembered that.”

Yukari’s expression turned stiff. Ayu squinted her eyes and looked at her.

“Well, we should still celebrate it, even though it’s late.”

“It’s fine. You got me a lot of stuff already. You even made a shelf for me. It’s already enough.”

“That’s not a birthday gift. Birthdays are special, after all.”

“…That was what I said.”

“…Right.”

Yukari looked away in defense, but then she suddenly chuckled.

Ayu followed her and laughed too.

“Well, let’s make it a joint celebration today? As for the presents, …hmm, let’s make something for each other?”

Ayu’s eyes brightened up after hearing Yukari’s suggestion.

“Sensei’s present…! Sure! Well, what are we making?”

Yukari looked at the flowers on the table.

“What about floating flowers? We have a lot of ingredients here.”

“What’s that?”

“You put dried flowers in a bottle and soak them in oil.”

She said that as she searched photos and showed them to Ayu.

Ayu cheered up after seeing the beautiful photos. “Cute…”

“There are some in sensei’s room too, right? So this is floating flowers…”

“Yeah, I made them a couple times. It’s easy and looks good as long as you got the ingredients. You can put it onto your shelf.”

“Yeah, …I want a decoration like that too.”

Then, Ayu looked at the table.

“Can I ask whether the ingredients mean…”

“You can use the flowers here freely.”

“Isn’t this present from your family?”

“It’s okay. These aren’t really presents. Also, I always give them to Mya-san because they take up a lot of space.”

“I-I see…”

Ayu looked a bit bewildered.

“There’s still oil left in the house. We need empty bottles next. Well, I’ll use perfume bottles or the grape wine I had yesterday.”

“What should I do…?”

“If you’re making it yourself, I feel like you can just use an empty bottle. Do you have one?”

“Hmm…”

Ayu thought for a moment and answered.

“I think the salmon fillets are almost finished. There are also cans of enoki mushroom sauce, seaweed sauce, MSGs, chicken bone broth powder…”

“Fufu.”

Yukari chuckled.

“It’s interesting to use bottled food. These count as your daily necessities too.”

“…There are still labels and expiration dates on them.”

“I guess it’s a style too. It’s for food, after all.”

“Ugh, …sensei is using perfumes and grape wine. It feels elegant.”

Ayu looked bothered. Yukari continued.

“Anyway, let’s start first. We can check out the department store if you don’t like it.”

*

After they disinfected the empty bottles with alcohol, Ayu and Hikari immediately started making the floating flowers.

Hikari’s is a perfume bottle that looks expensive. The design is very sophisticated. The empty bottle itself can be a stylish decoration.

Ayu chose a golden bottle of salmon fillets (which she had eaten already). This looks better than others.

She’s afraid of touching those high-class flowers. However, after seeing Hikari move her scissors without hesitations, she followed soon and got her favorite flower.

Hikari pinched the flowers and put them into the bottle one by one. Ayu looked at her movement and asked.

“Is there any technique to make it look good?”

“Uh, …your feelings?”

Ayu is a bit confused at this simple answer. Anyway, she decided to put in some rhinestones for nails before adding the flowers. The colors and sizes are all different. The entire bottle looks pretty vibrant.

After filling the bottle, the oil is slowly poured in, and the cap is sealed. Finally, it’s decorated with paper tapes.

It’s cuter than she expected. It doesn’t look like a bottle of salmon fillets at all. As for the expiration label or the text “please store in a fridge after opening the seal”, why don’t we just pretend we didn’t see that?

Ayu observed her work and showed a satisfied expression.

“Ayu-chan, this is your present.”

Hikari handed Ayu her DIY floating flower.

Hikari’s flowers are all yellow except for the huge red geranium in the center.

“I referenced your hair color.”

Ayu is shocked after seeing her smile.

Even though she said just go by your feeling, she still obeyed the rule of “giving Ayu a birthday present”. The beautiful bottle adds a couple more points too. The final result is excellent.

In comparison, hers is just plain and mundane. The more she looks at it, the more childish it becomes. It’s also a bottle of salmon fillets.

“Ayu-chan’s is pretty colorful and adorable too.”

Hikari observed Ayu’s floating flowers and praised her.

“H-Hey! Can I make another one?”

“Sure, why?”

“I want to use a better bottle to make a present that matches sensei better.”

Hikari glared at Ayu’s face and continued.

“We still have a lot of flowers. You can make as many as you want, but I’m taking this as your present.”

“W-Why? The colors and sizes are all messed up. I want to make something better for you..”

“It’s because these are the flowers you appreciated the most, right? The purity of this feeling is limited to the first time. It won’t show up again.”

Seeing Hikari’s warm smile, Ayu can feel that her cheeks are flaring up.

“…I got it. Well, uh, sensei, happy birthday.”

“Yeah, happy birthday to you too.”

They exchanged their floating flowers.

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*

After a quick lunch, instead of going to the nearby supermarket, Yukari and Ayu went to Shinjuku instead. It’s a high-class store that sells ingredients for their dinner.

While Yukari doesn’t cook, she actually knows how to make dishes.

The girls first made a cake filled with fruits. Then, with their wide Nakamura kitchen, they started pumping well-decorated dishes. Sliced fish, roasted beef, French vegetable frozen pie, and baked lobsters.

It’s been a long time since Yukari last spent her birthday with someone else.

Her family is very busy. There’s almost no way for them to show up in one place at one time. If someone cheated and spent the birthday with Yukari first, it’s guaranteed to cause a conflict. That’s why they made a gentlemen’s rule. No one sees Yukari on her birthday.

Some friends will message her on Line. However, they aren’t close enough to have a party together.

“Happy birthday.”

The table is now full of dishes. Yukari and Ayu cheered. The now 23-year-old Yukari has expensive champagne, while the 17-year-old Ayu is having a bubbles drink.

3 more years until we can drink together. …That’s a long time.

At this point, Yukari finally realized she just naturally assumed that Ayu would be with her 3 years later. She’s a bit surprised.

While Yukari already thinks that Ayu is a part of her daily life, she’s just here to work. One day, she’ll leave.

…If only she could stay here forever.

Yukari has numerous servants back in her old house, but this is the first time she’s having such a feeling.

Everyone is Different. I Love Everyone

Author: Hikari Kairou Illustrations: Mr. Gero

Plot Summary

Chikage Midou is the heir of a big enterprise. He's handsome, polite, and knowledgeable. A couple girls had already fallen for him when he was just 7 years old. They even promised to get married. However, their family declined when he reached 10 years old. These girls were eventually separated from him too. 7 years later, Chikage is living a pretty ordinary high school life. Then, the 5 girls he promised to marry appeared one by one and forced Chikage to fulfill his promise. Each of these girls is different but attractive in their own ways. Which one should Chikage choose?

Characters

[Chikage Midou]

A young man in his 2nd year of high school. After their family has fallen from grace, he still remembers the manners and talents in elementary school. He's a bit too hard to match. Girls always have a crush on him.

[Seika Takayashiki]

Chikage's fiancée. The daughter of a CEO.

[Chloe Winslet]

Chikage's fiancée. The daughter of an English noble.

[Yuina Sennenzaka]

Chikage's fiancée. Chess player.

[Kurewa Maibaru]

Chikage's fiancée. Idol.

Chapter 11: The Progress of Hot Spring Trip is Especially Fast Before the Deadline

It’s a night a few days after Hikari’s birthday.

Just as Ayu is watching drams in the living room, Hikari walks out of her studio. She looks exhausted.

The drafts are burning her butt again as usual. That’s why she has been sitting in her room since morning aside from meals.

Hikari got her some coffee using the coffee machine and sat down. After finishing it, she stared at the TV dazedly.

“…Can I ask how’s your work?”

Ayu finished watching and turned off the TV as she asked. Hikari slightly tilted her head.

“Hmm, …it’s hard to say?”

“Well, …give it everything you got.”

That’s the only thing Ayu can say.

Hikari sighed heavily. She then stood up and walked toward Ayu.

After that, she showed a mysterious smile and asked.

“Ayu-chan, should we go on a trip tomorrow?”

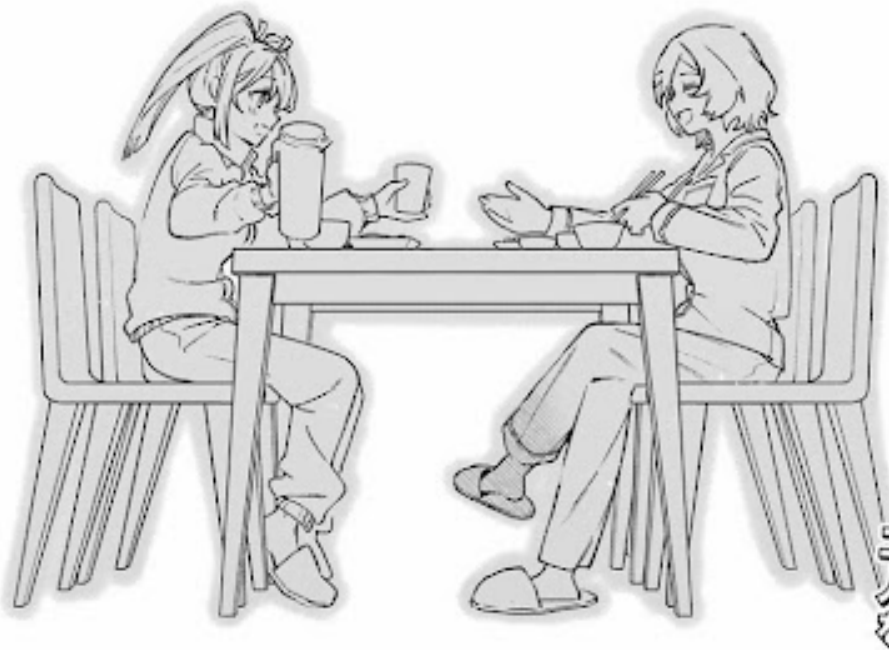
“A trip!?”

“Yes.”

“Uh, …where?”

これは

独り(ひと)だった人間が
独りではなくなるという



穏やかな時間は
二人をどう変えていくのか……。

ただそれだけの

ありふれたラブストーリーだ

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'22 Vol.01 12/25発売へつづく

“Well, …Mya-san will go after us if we go to Hakone or somewhere near. So, we should choose a faraway place. Tohoku, Hokuriku, or Kansai. …Screw it, why don’t we just go to Okinawa or Hokkaido.”

…It looks like this trip’s sole purpose is to avoid Miyako.

“Don’t do that! You need to take your work seriously.”

Hikari was just dragging her drafts a couple days ago. Miyako told Ayu furiously, “Break her collarbones and stop her if Hikari’s trying to play when the deadline is near.”

Hikari sat next to Ayu. Her tone turned serious.

“Do you understand, Ayu-chan? I have to go on a trip.”

“Have to?”

“I need 3 more MP to summon a finished draft, but this place only has 2. That’s why I need to refill it in another land.”

“I don’t understand, but no. Miya-chan will be mad.”

Ayu pouted. In the end, Hikari smiled mischievously.

“We can just keep it as a secret from her. Also, I’ll be bringing my laptop to work during the trip.”

“…Really?”

“Of course, I can work anywhere as long as I have my laptop. This is one of the advantages of being a novelist. In other words, this is more of a business trip.”

“…If that’s the case, I should tell Miya-chan first.”

“Don’t. We have to keep it a secret from Mya-san. You don’t want her to worry about us, right?”

It’s not even a worry. Miyako is literally like an ant on a hot pan right now.

“Uh…”

Hikari suddenly got really close to Ayu, who was still frowning. Her unexpected action made Ayu blush.

Hikari stared at Ayu with burning eyes.

“Ayu-chan, don’t you want to go on a trip? Don’t you want to go into a hot spring and enjoy good food to soothe your exhaustion?”

“Ugh…”

She’s not a big hot spring fan, and she’s not really tired. However, things are different if Hikari’s going as well.

“Uh, can I ask whether a trip means we’re staying a night…?”

Ayu asked. Hikari nodded and said, “Of course.”

“With this rare opportunity, I’m hoping we can at least stay for 2 days.”

…Going on a trip with Hikari, spending two nights in a hot spring hotel, eating good food, taking a bath together, sleeping in the same room.

Her brain is about to crash from imagining those scenes alone. She covered her face and shook away her pink-colored fantasies.

“Ayu-chan, are you okay?”

“I-It’s nothing! …You’ll really work properly, right?”

“Of course, trust me!”

Hikari’s smile is very suspicious, but beautiful things won’t change. Ayu’s mind can’t say no.

“Well, …then I’m going. I’ll not tell Miya-chan.”

Ayu mumbled quietly. Hikari screamed, “Yay!”

*

Yukari decided to travel to the Toyama Prefecture.

They are taking Shinkansen to Toyama Station on the first day. Their stay is in the city’s natural hot spring hotel. The girls plan to rent a girl to Toyoma Bay to have seafood on the second day. They will be staying in the Unazukionsen Hotel.

It’s been two months since Yukari’s last stayover trip. Ayu had never had one before she came here.

She’s used to traveling alone. The last time she went with someone was around a year ago. She and Miyako went to Sendai for an autograph session.

“Right, why did you choose Toyama?”

They took the Hokuriku “Hakutaka” Shinkansen in Tokyo, heading toward Toyama Station. Ayu asked Yukari when they were eating the bento limited to Tokyo Station. This is the first time Ayu’s in a Shinkansen. She’s more excited than usual.

“It’s because I’ve never been to Toyama before. Also, their most famous food is Toyama white shrimp. As a person who also has shrimp in her name, I want to see what the real thing looks like.” [TL: Yukari Ebiwara. Ebi means shrimp.]

“That’s all!?”

…Actually, the real reason is that she remembered a minuscule event happening in Toyama.

Shrimps are one of Yukari’s favorite food. But, she loves main courses like Japanese lobsters, giant tiger prawns, and white leg shrimps. Small ones like

Sakura shrimps aren’t on her list, but she still likes them. Toyama white shrimps look like Sakura shrimps with different colors from the photos. These ones are best for okonomiyaki or tempura only.

Yukari thought about as she dug in her beef tongue bento.

*

The girls spent over 2 and a half hours in Shinkansen.

The two arrived at Toyama Station at 2 PM. They decided to walk around the station first.

The Kitokito Market has a lot of souvenirs, and it’s just right next to the station. They don’t have to worry about gifts.

“Ayu-chan.”

Hikari suddenly stopped.

“What’s wrong?”

“Can you still eat?”

Hikari stared at the food models next to a restaurant’s entrance. It’s called “Shiroebi-tei”. She bet they can have Toyama white shrimps in there. [TL: It means a pavilion of white shrimps.]

“Yes.”

The train bento’s size isn’t great. They can definitely take on another bowl of rice.

Hikari smiled after hearing Ayu’s answer.

“Well, let’s go then.”

They walked into Shiroebi-tei. Ayu ordered a white shrimp tempura bowl, while Yukari got a white shrimp sashimi bowl.

It only took a while for their orders to arrive.

“This is Tomoya white shrimp…”

Hikari pinched one up and observed.

Ayu also picked a piece of white shrimp tempura up.

An average piece of white shrimp tempura is around 6 cm long. The entire thing is just fried and covered the entire bowl of rice. Just like the word, the body of the ripe shrimps is white.

As for Hikari’s sashimi bowl, the raw shrimps’ heads and shells have already been removed. Egg silk is on top of the glistening shrimps. According to the menu, there are 90 raw shrimps in total.

“It’s bigger than I expected. I thought it was around the size of Sakura shrimps.”

Hikari nodded after hearing Ayu.

“Me too, but the taste is the most important part. How is it?”

Hikari ate a raw shrimp after saying that.

Ayu also took a bite of the tempura. The shell is soft. It crumbled after taking a bite only. After it’s crushed, the sweetness of the shrimp is released. While white shrimps are small, their taste and flavor are very solid. It does feel like she’s eating tempura. Very satisfying.

“Hmm, …this one is real too.”

Hikari was shocked. She continued.

“Can I have a tempura?”

“Ah, sure, here.”

Hikari pinched a piece of tempura from Ayu’s bowl.

“You should have some raw shrimps too.”

Ayu followed Hikari and took a raw shrimp from her bowl before dipping it in soy sauce.

The raw shrimp is very chewy and tastes richer than ordinary sweet shrimp. It’s delicate.

“The tempura is good too…! White shrimps, I’m so sorry for underestimating you guys before. …You are definitely worthy of being treated as the main course. How fantastic…!”

Ayu felt a tinge of warmth in her heart after Hikari said that.

*

They shared and finished their bowls before heading to the hotel.

The girls entered the room after checking in.

The atmosphere here is between that of a business and a holiday hotel. There’s a natural hot spring. Their room is around 10 square meters.

Formal tables, fast internet, it has everything.

“Wow, I feel like the progress will skyrocket if I work here.”

Yukari nodded and agreed. She continued.

“Well, let’s go to the hot spring.”

“Eh!? Aren’t you supposed to work!?”

Yukari laughed mischievously to the shocked Ayu.

“I think I’ve left my laptop at home. Hiya, I’m so clumsy!”

“You absolutely did that on purpose, right…?”

Ayu squinted her eyes and glared at her.

“Well, let’s go to the hot spring?”

“N-Not yet for me.”

“Eh? Why?”

Yukari found it unbelievable. She asked Ayu, but Ayu avoided her gaze.

“I don’t love hot springs that much. I can just go before I sleep…”

“Heh? The best part about a hot spring hotel is you can dip in a big bathhouse…”

“No need to mind me. Please just enjoy it, sensei.”

“Hmm, …I got it. Well, I’ll be leaving.”

Even though it’s a pity, she can’t force Ayu to go.

Yukari took the towel in the room’s wardrobe and walked to the huge bathhouse.

The time is exactly 3 PM, just the start of the opening hours. Since it’s a weekday, no one else is around.

She washed her body and sank into the huge bathtub with a hinoki wood scent. The water level is just above her shoulders. Then, she stretched her legs to their fullest. The temperature of the hot water is sinking into her body. The exhaustion from work seemed to have dissolved as well. Even though there’s an open bathhouse here, the sunlight is really harsh. Let’s go at night instead.

She entered the steam bath before repeating the hot springs again.

After changing into the in-house clothes, Yukari dried her hair and walked outside. She got a milk juice from the vending machine and enjoyed it on the chair.

“Phew…”

It’s been a long time since she enjoyed herself in a hot spring. She took a deep breath in satisfaction.

The hot spring is great, and she’s the only one here as well.

…If only Ayu is here too.

*

Ayu and Hikari played video games until dusk. Then, they searched for dinner outside.

The one the girls chose is the famous Toyama black ramen.

The broth of the black ramen is very rich in soy sauce. Along with peppers, it’s indeed black ramen. The saltiness will match really well with white rice.

Ayu and Hikari added white rice and Kanto cooking without hesitation. The seaweed consumption of Toyama ranks top in Japan. The seaweed slices on the Toyama Kanto cooking are its feature. Aside from the basic white radish, chikuwa, eggs, and konjac, there are also creative Toyama matches like white shrimp fishballs.

They returned to the hotel after filling their stomach with good food. Hikari immediately lay on the bed.

“Phew, I’m so full that I can’t move. …Also, I’m tired.”

“You’ll turn into a cow.”

“Moo, moo.”

Hikari half-heartedly made some cow noises. Ayu smiled bitterly.

Ayu is pretty full, but not to the point where she can’t move. The difference is probably Hikari ordered 2 beers just then.

“…I’ll go to the hot springs.”

Ayu said that to Hikari, who was still lying on the bed. She left the room after taking the towel and clothes.

There are more customers in the bathhouse, but they are either middle-aged or elderly women. Ayu is relieved.

Even though she loves Hikari only, she can’t help but feel stimulated when she sees a young girl’s naked body. Even if she knows she can’t control it, the guilt is deep.

Indeed, she was really excited knowing that she could go to the hot springs with Hikari. However, she quickly hesitated when Hikari was really going to do that.

Even though Hikari always walks around the room naked after taking a shower and sleeping without anything on. So, Ayu has already seen her body a couple times.

However, if Hikari knows that she’s looking at her sexually-

At this point, she remembers the despising gazes of her past friends.

-It’s because I still feel pretty disgusted. I bet you must be staring at us with lewd eyes when we’re changing clothes during PE lessons.

She’ll die if Hikari joins their ranks too.

Ayu washed away the overwhelming fear with a hot shower. She then sank into the tub.

“Ayu-chan.”

Her heart nearly jumped out when someone called her name suddenly.

Hikari is standing next to her.

She’s just standing there blatantly without a towel. Her whole body is in view.

Ayu can’t think after seeing such a beautiful body. She turned stiff. Hikari slowly sat in the tub in front of her.

“Phew, this hot spring is indeed amazing.”

Hikari said that leisurely. Ayu tried her best to squeeze out a sentence.

“S-Sensei, aren’t you sleeping in the room…?”

“I was just taking a nap. I wanted to sleep, but if you’re going to the hot spring, then I’m in.”

“R-Really…?”

“Yeah, there are other people around here at this time. I literally was alone here at 3 PM.”

“I-I see…”

Ayu is both nervous and excited. She can’t talk properly. As for Hikari, she looks genuinely relieved in contrast.

“W-Well, then it’s about time for me to head out!”

“Ehh!? That fast!?”

Ayu suddenly stood up. Hikari is shocked.

Ayu tried her best to not look at Hikari.

“I-I’m a bit dizzy.”

“That fast!? Ah, but your face is really red. …Are you okay?”

“I’m okay!”

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Ayu escaped from the bathhouse. She heard Hikari's guilty tone. "You really don't like hot springs…"

Great, she didn't find out.

Aside from guilt and fear, she hates how dirty she is for feeling happy when seeing Hikari at such a close distance. All of these negative emotions are about to crush her.

*

The next day.

After eating a buffet breakfast in the hotel, Yukari again went to the hot spring. Then, they rested in the room until checking out at 10 AM.

They rented a Tanto from the nearby car renting a store in Toyama Station. The girls are heading to Toyama Bay.

"I didn't know sensei can drive."

Ayu is sitting next to Hikari. Her face is full of admiration.

"I got my license right away when I turned 18, but I only drive during trips."

"You don't have your own car?"

"I don't really need a car in Tokyo. Also, maintenance and check-ups are troublesome."

The whole family said they gave her high-class cars and garages for presents once she got the license. She rejected all of them, though.

She loves driving during a trip, but she's not interested in the cars themselves. Any car will do as long as it's safe and comfortable.

Their first stop is the Come On Park Shinminato, a roadside station. The fried assorted white shrimp burger is found here exclusively. They also got some

fried white shrimp rice balls as snacks. Unexpectedly, there are a lot of exclusive goods and food in these stations. It’s one of the joys of a self-drive trip.

“It’s crunchy and yummy!”

Ayu smiled as she took a big bite out of the burger.

“Hmm, I guess the greatest prize we’ve earned is knowing Toyama white shrimps.”

Yukari said that as she searched for the hometown tax website on her phone. She saw frozen Toyama white shrimp in the souvenirs section and ordered right away. Yukari always orders in the hometown tax website whenever she sees gourmet during trips. It saves money and supports the locals, killing two birds with one stone.

The girls drove for another 30 minutes from Come On Park Shinminato to Himi Fishing Port. They bought a lot of things and had rock oysters and seafood bowls. After that, they went up to the observation deck to see Kara Island and the peaks of Tateyama. They took a photo and went to the footbath before going to the Unazukionsen Hotel.

The sea breeze feels very good when they open the car window.

Enjoying the wind on a road trip with a cute girl next to her.

“This feels like a date.”

Yukari said what was on her mind.

“D-Date!?”

Ayu freaked out. Her face is as red as a tomato.

“Don’t old movies or dramas always have people driving next to the sea? If I’m Takuya Kimura or Yuji Oda, this is literally a scene from the golden period of dramas long ago.”

“R-Really…?”

It looks like modern high school girls don’t understand this. However, Yukari has only checked out a couple online. She’s not familiar with old dramas either.

“R-Right, sensei, are we going to the hotel?”

Ayu changed the topic.

“Yeah, but there’s a place I want to stop by.”

The GPS isn’t set to the hotel but a certain address. This place is why she wants to visit Toyama.

“Stop by?”

“Yeah, it’s a winery.”

“Winery?”

“A winery for Japanese wine. I think there’s a store inside. I want to get some wine there.”

“Oh, does the wine taste good?”

Ayu doesn’t look interested.

“Hmm, …I guess…it’s okay? I prefer famous ones like Tagu and Maboroshi no Taki if we’re talking about Toyama’s wine.

“Eh? Then why are we going there?”

“In <Sun Tzu’s Art of Love>’s adaptation, there’s a scene where the MC is drinking the wine made here. Then, the child of the winery is coincidentally a fan of the original. The fan sent me a lot of letters and wine.”

Also, the original didn’t specify the actual brand of Japanese wine. The person who chose it is the director of the adaptation. So, the wine is supposed to be delivered to the director instead of the novelist. However, it’s hard for the audience to get the correct person. If she got it, why not just drink it in appreciation?

“So, are you going there to thank that person?”

“Not really. I’m just going to buy a couple bottles of wine. I may disturb them if I just go there and greet them this suddenly.”

It took nearly an hour of driving through downtown Toyama to get to the winery.

The shop is about the size of a small convenience store. The staff member is a woman in her mid-40s. There are no customers around.

Ayu probably finds buying wine really boring. Let’s just leave after getting the most expensive and appeared in the adaptation.

Yukari thought about that as she looked inside the store.

“Ah, sensei, this…”

Ayu pointed at the special area. There’s a slogan that says, “The official wine of the Japanese show <Sun Tzu’s Art of Love>!” A self-made poster is right next to it. It shows the enlarged image of the wine-drinking scene. Aside from that, there’s a leaflet for the show itself. The original novel is displayed in a transparent cover too.

“Hahaha…”

Yukari can’t help but smile bitterly.

The so-called “wine” is just a scene. Also, it’s not even an important one. However, it’s really ridiculous that it is treated so honorably.

But, …it doesn’t feel bad.

With this rare opportunity, she should treat her fans well in Toyama.

“I’m sorry.”

Yukari called the staff member.

“What?”

Yukari gently smiled at the staff member coming here. She pointed at the <Sun Tzu’s Art of Love> novel.

“I’m the author of this novel, Kairou. Is it possible for me to meet the people in the winery?”

The woman bulged her eyes-

*

The woman in the store is the wife of the winery’s boss. It’s her kid who sent the letters and wine to Hikari.

This fangirl passed away half a year ago.

She was only 16 years old at the time. The cause of death seems to be suicide from being bullied at school.

This girl is a hardcore fan of Hikari Kairou. She had read everything by Hikari, not just <Sun Tzu’s Art of Love>. All of the books she owned were put into her coffin during the funeral.

-That child must be having a good time reading sensei’s books in heaven.

That’s what the mother said. Hikari’s expression looked complicated. It seemed that she was both angry and sad.

They left the winery after getting some sake before heading to the hotel.

The view outside the window changed from the sea to the mountains. Ayu looked outside as she pondered about this deceased girl.

Ayu has never been in enough pain to end herself.

When being forced to come out or when her parents insult her mercilessly, she only wants to say, “I’m going to kill them all.” The idea of suicide has never appeared in her mind.

However, if she stayed in school instead of leaving, would her mind finally break down and follow the young girl’s path one day?

She glimpsed at Hikari.

Before leaving the winery, Hikari just mumbled, “…Hmm, I guess that happens too.” She didn’t say anything after getting onto the car.

Ayu doesn’t know what she can say as well. The only voice left in the car is the GPS.

However, once they got to the hotel…

“Uwah, we’re finally here! I was so nervous driving in the mountains! I’m going to the hot springs right now!”

Hikari stretched and laughed upon leaving the car.

…So, Hikari isn’t upset about the winery. She was just focusing on driving. Is that why she didn’t talk? After checking up and going into the room, Hikari immediately went to the hot springs in light steps.

Her situation was normal after she came back from the hot springs. They spent the rest of the day playing video games.

The luxurious dinner in the hotel greatly pleased Hikari. She went to bed after having it.

It looks like she doesn’t have to worry about it.

Ayu sighed in relief. She went to the hot spring after taking an hour-long break.

Since Hikari came yesterday, she immediately excused herself. So, that’s why she wants to take her time chilling in the hot spring today.

The bathhouse in this hotel is open. One of the biggest attractions is the Kurobe Gorge in plain eyes. Regrettably, it’s barely visible at night. However, that just makes the starry sky on top even better. Staying in the bath and observing the sky dazedly nearly made her forget the passage of time. She understands why people love hot springs now.

It wasn’t until Ayu returned to the room after thoroughly enjoying the hot springs that she knew Hikari was just pretending to be fine.

“Ahh, …Ayu-chan, you’re back.”

Hikari stared at Ayu with gloomy eyes. She smiled helplessly.

Hikari is drinking sake on the wooden floor next to the window. She’s matching it with the fish paste and soy sauce firefly squid she got in Himi Market today.

She seems to be very drunk already. Her face is red, and the collar of her yukata is wide open.

Ayu doesn’t look where she should look. She looked away and sat on her own futon.

“Hoho, …Ayu-chan, let’s drink with me, okay?”

“No.”

“Then just come here. The kamaboko is good.”

“……”

Ayu thought Hikari would be disappointed if she rejected her. That’s why she sat in front of her. She got a piece of kamaboko with a toothpick. Then, she tried her best to not look at her chest. The Toyama white shrimps are fried on it. The scent is very appetizing.

“Ah, you’re right. It’s good.”

Hikari smiled after hearing Ayu’s thoughts. “Right?” Then, she sipped some sake and tasted it. Her movement is really flirtatious. Ayu’s face started flaring up.

“Phew…”

Hikari sighed for a long while.

“Ahh, …this is so good. …I just want to go on trips, hot springs, play video games, and then have good food and drink in the morning. I only want to live a lazy life like this…”

Hikari gazed outside the window. Her eyes are helpless.

“Sensei…?”

Ayu was surprised to hear that. Hikari finished the sake in her cup at once in front of Ayu.

“…Don’t put such a heavy burden on my shoulders.”

She mumbled as if she was cursing this world.

Hikari barely managed to continue.

“…I just want to live carefully. I want to be a free, casual, capricious, fallen, and fickling piece of garbage. I don’t want to work hard, so please don’t treat me as the pillar of your life. I just want my novels to be mass-produced consumables that are easy to forget.”

Her voice is trembling.

“Don’t bring those things to heaven…”

A drop of tear slid down.

Tears dropped from Hikari’s eyes and onto the table.

This is the first time Ayu saw Hikari crying. She was dazed.

Then, she felt…

Sensei looks just as beautiful, even when she’s crying.

However, it’s not just beauty.

She’s talented at everything, but she’s kind of careless.

She looks carefree, but she’s unexpectedly observant.

She’s hard to grasp, but she has some soft parts. She’ll cry for her friends’ tragedy.

She’s smart and dumb, sensitive and dense, gentle and cold, frivolous and serious, free and constrained, mature and innocent, carefree and strict.

She’s a very complicated and annoying person.

Even though she fell in love at first sight, the closer and the more she knows Hikari, she realizes it’s not just about the looks. Everything about her makes Ayu wants to treasure her.

Hikari wiped her tears and showed a light, bitter smile to Ayu.

“…I don’t want others to have expectations for me. I don’t want to be a protagonist. I don’t want other people to think I’m special.”

Hikari sounded like she was begging and praying. Tears formed in Ayu’s eyes too.

-I can’t hold myself anymore.

I love this person too much.

“Sensei, there’s a regrettable piece of news I have to tell you.”

“Eh?” Hikari tilted her head.

“It’s impossible for other people to not think you’re special. It’s because sensei is already special in my heart.”

“Ayu-chan…?”

Don’t say it. It’s impossible to turn back after saying it. Ayu’s mind sounded the alarm.

However, her love for Hikari is sweeping. What she wants to say is already at her lips. She can’t pull the brakes anymore.

“I love sensei.”

Hikari’s eyes immediately bulged. She freaked out and answered.

“Uh, you mean in that way, right? Like love as in respect, right?”

“No, honestly, I don’t respect sensei at all…”

Hikari’s lips unexpectedly turned flat after hearing Ayu’s truthful answer.

Ayu gazed into Hikari’s eyes and confessed again.

“I’m into girls. The feeling I have for sensei is love, sexually as well. I love you.”

Hikari stared at Ayu dazedly for a moment. She attempted to digest what she said.

“R-Really?”

Ayu nodded and gave a weak, bitter smile.

“Yeah.”

“R-Right…”

Hikari looked troubled. Her eyes moved around.

“How should I put it? …I’m…sorry.”

“……”

Ayu’s chest was stabbed the moment she heard her rejection. Huge drops of tears fell from her eyes. Even though she knew this would happen, it still hurt a lot.

“I-I know. I’m really disgusting, right? Sorry, …I’m so sorry.”

However, for some reason, Hikari freaked out.

“N-No! I’m sorry! That’s not what I meant!”

“Eh?”

Hikari awkwardly continued. Ayu was puzzled.

“I-It’s because, uh, …I don’t know you are, but I just walked around naked in front of you after taking a shower and tried to drag you into the hot spring too. …I guess that must have bothered you.”

“…You’re, well, right.”

Ayu agreed and continued.

“But that’s not sensei’s fault. …This is who I am. My bad…”

Ayu showed a deflated smile. As for Hikari, she glanced at her with gentle eyes.

“Ayu-chan, let’s go out.”

“…Huh?”

Ayu didn’t understand what Hikari was saying. Her brain froze.

“I’m saying let’s become couples.”

Ayu kept trying to understand what Hikari said. After she finally got it, Ayu’s body felt as if it had caught on fire.

“Ehh!? W-W-Why…?”

“Why? Didn’t you confess to me?”

“Y-You’re right! B-But, it’s because…”

Ayu was so confused that she couldn’t muster proper words. Hikari smiled bitterly.

“Honestly, I don’t really understand what it is like to feel love as well, but I sincerely want to be with you. You look at me…sexually, right? I don’t hate that.”

Hikari was a bit embarrassed. She blushed.

She looks too cute, beautiful, gorgeous, delicate, charming, and lovable. Ayu’s heart is about to explode.

“Can we?”

She asked with a trembling voice. Ayu nodded. “Yeah.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“Sensei and I are really-“

As if it’s a dream, Ayu slowly stands up. Hikari follows her too.

She approached Hikari and hugged her tightly to confirm this wasn’t a dream.

Hikari hugged Ayu gently as well.

“Not a dream, …it’s really not a dream.”

Ayu buried her face in Hikari’s chest and exhaled.

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The next morning.

Yukari woke up. Ayu is still sleeping next to her. Her breaths are heavy.

Both of them are naked.

Yukari’s cheeks flared up when she remembered what happened yesterday.

What if other rooms heard their moans…?

Should she say Ayu is skilled (she said she has practiced with her body)? Or do their bodies match each other? Is Yukari just sensitive? Anyway, she was so high and wild yesterday that even she was shocked.

She thought Ayu was a puppy, but she’s a big, bad wolf…

The heat from Ayu’s body still remains over Yukari’s entire body.

She stared at Ayu’s sleeping face. A tinge of confusion surfaced in her heart. Is this really okay?

She knew that Ayu would’ve left her if she rejected Ayu.

That’s why she asked her out. It’s just that she never thought she would rather do this than be separated from Ayu. She’s perplexed about this too.

Yukari doesn’t understand the feeling of love.

Her family loves her, the readers love her. Both boys and girls loved and confessed to Yukari, but she has never fallen in love with anyone.

Of course, Yukari has her important and loved ones. Her parents, siblings, Miyako, and friends, for example.

However, she’s pretty sure she can accept the fact calmly if they ever left.

She never freaked out, even if her favorite maid resigned or her good friend transferred.

Only Ayu is different.

Ayu Shirakawa is the only person that Yukari hopes to never leave her.

Perhaps this kind of stubbornness is love.

It’s hard to imagine her own feeling for Ayu. However, it’s the same as all of those feelings described in books, movies, dramas, and every single story worldwide. It’s beautiful, ugly, exciting, and painful.

She knows what happiness, excitement, interest, beauty, deliciousness, and comfort is.

Yet, she can’t understand love.

“…But I guess it’s okay if it’s happy and comfortable.”

Yukari mumbled with a cheerful expression.

Then…

“Ugh…”

Ayu opened her eyes and made a cute noise.

“Good morning, Ayu-chan.”

“Good morning…!”

Ayu’s face immediately went red after seeing Yukari’s naked body. She woke up.

Ayu looked at Yukari and her own body.

“T-This isn’t a dream…”

Ayu’s voice can be heard barely. Yukari smiled bitterly.

“How can you say that after fondling with my body?”

“Ugh, …I-I’m sorry.”

“No need to apologize. I think…it was great too.”

Yukari said that awkwardly. Ayu sighed in relief, but she was soon startled again.

“But this still feels like a dream. Can I really be that happy…?”

“Well, why not we check it once again to see if it’s a dream?”

Yukari gave a mischievous smile. Ayu whispered yes and nodded. Her watery eyes are looking at Yukari.

Their faces slowly got closer, just as their lips were about to touch-

Yukari’s phone started vibrating.

“Sheesh…”

She sighed and looked at the screen. It shows “Miyako Shirakawa”. Miyako would’ve kept calling her if she didn’t answer. That’s why she said,

“I’ll just deal with her. Just a moment.”

Yukari picked up the phone after saying that to Ayu. In the end-

“…You had fun yesterday.”

Yukari’s eyes bulged after hearing this hellish voice.

H-How did you know? …She almost screamed. However, she managed to suppress it and tried her best to maintain a calm tone.

“Eh? What are you talking about, Mya-nee? I was rushing the draft since yesterday night in my house. I stayed up all night. Hiya, I was almost done. I could’ve finished it if it wasn’t for this call!”

“…The Unazukionsen Hotel in Toyama is such a nice place. The Toyama white shrimps and seafood bowl look pretty delicious too.”

“Huh!?”

Yukari fell speechless after hearing Miyako.

“W-Why…?”

Miyako knows exactly where she is. Terrifying.

“You come back right now. Otherwise, your body will be found under the Kurobe Dam.”

“A-Alright…”

Hearing Miyako’s demonic voice, Yukari can only tremble and say yes.

Then, Miyako hung up after dropping a “goodbye”.

…It looks like the “fun” Miyako said is about the trip instead of their first-time last night, …but she still doesn’t understand.

Of course, she had already checked whether there was a GPS signal tracker on her luggage. There also aren’t any strange apps on her phone. If that’s the case-

Yukari looked at Ayu and asked.

“Ayu-chan, are you using any social media platforms?”

“Eh? Ah, well, yes. I guess.”

Ayu nodded. She then continued a bit nervously.

“B-But I was just uploading pictures of food and scenery once in a while. I have no followers, and you won’t know it’s me from my username alone! I didn’t tell Miya-chan as well!”

“Oh…”

It looks like Ayu was being careful too. However…

“Did you tell Mya-san what did we eat?”

“Eh? Maybe a couple times…”

“Then this is probably the reason. Mya-san already knows Ayu-chan’s account.”

“Ehh!? How did she do it!?”

“Suppose you told her we had stewed beef yesterday. She’ll go on social media and search for beef or dinner. It’s only a matter of time before she finds a photo with my house’s utensils and table.”

“Aren’t there a bunch of people uploading things like that every day?”

“An editor’s profession is to find the target in a sea of photos.”

An editor’s job is to search for the tiniest mistakes in a draft with tens of thousands of words. It’s nothing for them to look up a photo among hundreds.

“Ehh, …Miya-chan is terrifying.”

Ayu was startled. She continued.

“Sorry, sensei. …It’s my fault.”

Ayu was deflated. Yukari gently patted her head.

“Even if you didn’t tell her what we ate, Mya-san can still find where I am with other ways. If you’re not using any social media, she’ll secretly install a tracker app on your phone. She can also track our location with cloud photos. She can even hire a professional detective if the time comes.”

“Sheesh, that’s ridiculous, …right?”

Ayu could barely contain her laughter at first, but then she realized Yukari wasn't trying to comfort her. She was serious. Ayu's face turned stiff.

"Eh, …are all editors like this?"

"At least the famous editors in the industry are all warriors with a slightly twisted mind. Mya-san is one of them."

"The Warrior Miya-chan. …It sounds cool."

"…Please don't become an editor."

Ayu's expression looked like she was hoping for something for some reason. Yukari warned her and continued.

"Well, if our location is exposed, let's just go back to Tokyo after eating breakfast. …I was going to go on an observation tram in Kurobe Gorge."

Yukari sighed. Ayu continued regrettably.

"I was hoping for our trip to be longer too. …W-We just turned into a couple, after all."

Yukari's face flared up after hearing that.

"We can go celebrate again after the draft is done."

"Really!?"

Ayu's eyes brightened up. Yukari nodded. "Of course."

"Great."

Then, Ayu's tone turned slightly embarrassed and spoiled.

"Sensei."

"Hmm?"

“There’s still a bit of time before breakfast. Do you want to go to the hot spring together?”

Upon hearing Ayu’s suggestion, Yukari smiled.

“You’re really lewd.”

“I-I’m not! I’m just thinking that we shouldn’t waste the opportunity and go to the hot spring again!”

“Alright, alright.”

She didn’t answer Ayu’s retort. Instead, she stood up and got on her underwear and yukata.

“Sheesh…”

Ayu mumbled and hastily got on her yukata as well.

Yukari took the towel and clothes.

“Well, let’s go, …Ayu.”

Yukari hesitated for a moment, but she decided to call her name directly. Ayu’s big eyes bulged even further after hearing that.

“Alright, Yukari-san.”

Her smile melted Yukari’s heart. With this feeling, she walked outside the room with Ayu.

Even though she doesn’t understand love, it’s okay as long as Ayu is here with her.

That’s what Yukari Ebiwara thinks.

Special: The Progress of Chatting with the Editor is Especially Fast Before the Deadline

“What are light novels?”

“What’s with that sudden question…?”

The author Hikari Kairou said that in a slightly serious tone. The editor Miyako Shirakawa frowned.

“I got the newcomer award, and I wrote a couple books after making my debut. However, I suddenly remembered that I didn’t really understand the definition of light novels. Am I really writing light novels?”

“…There’s no end in thinking of the definition of light novels. Give up.”

Miyako continued deflatedly.

“From an editor’s perspective, the term ‘light novel’ is a classification in sales instead of a genre. That’s why light novels aren’t related to the content or text. Whether because it’s a rom-com, has cute characters, or simple words that make it a light novel. Or, the story is heavy and the genre is deep, which makes it not a light novel. These discussions are meaningless.”

“So, even if the content is the same, it’s a light novel as long as it’s published by a light novel publisher, not when the opposite is true?”

“This is the simplest classification if you want a clear answer.”

Hikari still looks unconvinced. Miyako shows her a bitter smile.

“Actually, I think this doesn’t make any sense at all. If we put it more vaguely, some people just want to read light novel-style books. Then, the publisher that publishes this kind of book is light novels.”

“I feel like you’re just paraphrasing. …The so-called ‘light novel-style’ changes accordingly with time and people, right?”

“That’s why it’s hard to make a definition. If it’s about sales, then what does online novel count as? Everyone treats some books as light novels, yet the publisher denies them. Some publishers even created new words like new literature and light literature.”

“…I see. There’s really no end.”

Hikari seems to start feeling annoyed by this.

“Stop thinking about it if you understand. Rush your drafts. A novelist’s job is to write interesting books, and our job is to send them to the interested readers.

Hikari said yes deflatedly. Then, she reluctantly began writing her long-overdue draft. She’s actually not really bothered about what light novels are. She just wanted to change up the mood. That’s why she threw a topic out. … But, honestly, she has had difficulty finding the motivation to write light novels recently.

Will she be more motivated if there’s a beautiful girl who can take care of chores and set a schedule for her? …Hikari thought about trivial matters like that.

This was a couple months before she met with Ayu Shirakawa.

The Progress of Yuri is Especially Fast Before the Deadline
(切前には百合が捗る)

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